QUAYLE'S INVENTION

By John Taine

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE PURPLE SAPPHIRE

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QUAYLE'S INVENTION

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BY

JOHN TAINE

AUTHOR OF "THE PURPLE SAPPHIRE"

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Part I
UNCIVILIZED

QUAYLE'S INVENTION

CHAPTER I

ALONE

THE yacht had vanished!

For the first time Quayle knew with every fibre of his body that he was alone. The smug Cutts, in well-chosen words, had indeed told him so less than two hours ago. But in his stunned amazement at the sheer outrageousness of his "sentence," Quayle had not fully understood the banker's polished phrases. Now, the dreary vastness of the warm ocean before him, the drearier sea of barren dunes behind, and the monotonous thunder on the endless beach bore terrible witness that, for once, Cutts had not lied. If further testimony to the truth were demanded, the sky spoke. Where the clean blue cut sharply down to the silver edge of the sea, a single fast-dissolving smudge of oil smoke fouled the misty azure. In a few moments the last visible sign of the great international banker and all his ruthless opulence would be swallowed up in the infinite vault, and Quayle might king it over an undisputed emptiness of sand, sky, and sea.

That he knew neither the name of the tossing ocean

before him, nor that of the continent on whose desolate shore he stood, seemed a thing of no account. He was overwhelmed by the appalling certainty that he was alone, "cut off," as the famous banker had unctuously expressed it, "from intercourse with your fellow men."

The sky was again clean. Not a wisp of smoke from the oil-burner remained to bear to this virgin wilderness the annunciation of a civilization which it could never cherish. Quayle took possession of his kingdom. Not so much as a solitary gull disputed his right to reign. He still seemed to hear the maddening smoothness of the banker's last oration. Cutts, he reflected with a sneer, must have rehearsed his pompous farewell for months. Not even in his much-quoted "Thursday morning message" to the International Gold Council at Lucerne had word followed stilted word so mincingly.

"David," he had said from the launch, just before his yellow curs shoved off, "David, I have always had a sincere liking for you. And Sheila, I believe I am right in saying, has loved you sincerely. But she now sees you in the same light as I have always seen you since I first learned your secret. Yours is a terrible secret, David. You are a menace to civilization. Chemistry in your hands is an engine of destruction, waiting only your will to release it and abolish—wipe out utterly, I say—the slow progress of sixty or a hundred centuries. Is it for this that the human race has sweated blood? Was it to enthrone *you* as despot of the world's destinies that Lavoisier begged the mob

for an hour to finish his experiments before they dragged him to the guillotine?"

He paused for Quayle to make some reply. Receiving only a contemptuous stare, he continued his harangue.

"I do not exaggerate when I say that you have it in your power to wreck civilization. You are a scourge of God and a menace to humanity. I admit that I am violating the laws of civilized peoples and the wider laws of hospitality. For my justification I must appeal to generations yet unborn. Let them judge. I shall be content with their verdict. I am doing my simple duty to the human race. You must be cut off from intercourse with your fellow men."

Thinking it over, Quayle appreciated the banker's point of view. Had he been the mature man of unlimited wealth, and Cutts the struggling young inventor, he too might have indulged highflown, oratorical fancies for saving his fellow men from self-destruction. But as it was he followed his natural bent and stretched to the limit the powerful mind that was his. His demon drove him, and he could not help himself. To be the custodian of a flaming inventive genius and not use it, for good or for evil as the case might be, was as impossible to him as was the burying of gold bonds to the banker.

Quayle was an inventor. The probable consequences of his master invention had not greatly troubled him. To create, to invent, to put the new science to new use, that, and that alone, sufficed him. Let the nations of the world squander his secret broadcast, or hoard

it in their steel locked archives as they liked, it was all one to him, the inventor. He at any rate would no longer be a humble lackey to poverty. With the money that he despised and Cutts worshipped he could purchase liberty. With liberty to do what he liked, when he liked, he might solve the riddle of the universe. What did Cutts, or what did any man whose whole life has been devoted to the service of money, know of the holy hunger for the gold that makes genius free?

In the launch Quayle had interrupted the banker's torrential eloquence but once.

"Did Sheila know that I was to be marooned when you invited me to take this trip around the world?"

"I told my daughter of my intention two weeks before we sailed from New York."

"And she consented?"

"Sheila has a well-developed social consciousness. The individual, she believes, must be sacrificed for the good of the community, and the true scientist must sink his personal ambitions in the welfare of the race. She thinks as I do on these questions."

"Evidently, if what you say is true. Still, I doubt if Sheila could ever be the pompous, theatrical ass—or its feminine equivalent—that you are. She has a sense of humor. You haven't. You're just a plain after-dinner speaker. Still, for the sake of argument, let us assume that you are not lying. Then Sheila has merely a pretty face and the mind of a half-witted parrot. In that case I thank God that some other man is to marry her. Every time she opened her mouth

I should hear you preaching. And again, if you are not lying, this dirty deal is no more than I deserve for being such a fool as to imagine that I was ever in love with your daughter. But, to speak plainly, I think you are lying. If you still care for Sheila you had better not let this little business of yours leak out. If you do let it out, and it comes her way, she will lose her 'social consciousness' and remember that she is human. Then she will wish she were in hell. Sheila doesn't know. You are an orator and a liar. Why did you discover at the last moment that Sheila was 'ill,' and ship her off to Paris to consult a specialist? She was as well as you were, or you would have gone to Paris to take care of her. I have proved my point. Sheila did care for me. She does still. When she hears of this she will hate you like rat poison. And the joke of it is that you can't help telling her yourself. You will give it away every time you open your mouth. You will want to talk of me when she is beginning to forget that I was ever alive and as far from death as she. When my bones are rotten your silly gabble will make them dance before her eyes. You lose. Better tell her I died of the plague in Singapore. If you can buy one white man to help you to commit murder you should be rich enough to hire some drunken doctor to forge my death certificate. But again, you lose."

It had taken more than an hour in the heavy surf to beach the generous supplies which were to emprison Quayle's soul in his body until he either fitted his way of life to the drifting dunes, or ceased forever to be

"a menace to humanity." Murder outright takes a certain amount of brute courage. Neither Cutts nor the renegade captain of the yacht itched to use his revolver. As for the Lascars of the crew, they understood no English beyond the commoner curses. If they had understood, the proceedings would not have interested them. Cowards to their yellow marrows, they would see a fellow man hacked to pieces rather than risk a cuff. They had been shipped at Singapore when the white crew "deserted"—for a handsome consideration—and would be dumped at the nearest Malay port to forget and be forgotten. Quayle, in the infamous war phrase, was to be "sunk without a trace." His impulse to seize the launch and run for the open sea, on the gambler's chance of being picked up far out by a passing trader, was promptly nipped. Cutts assured him that if he moved he would be instantly shot "like a mad dog." At twenty-nine one does not embrace death as a bride. Quayle stood where he was told, trying not to hear the banker's lecture.

"Neither this place nor the day of your landing was chosen at random. This is the beginning of the dry season in this particular spot."

Quayle made no answer. Cutts hurried on, as if half terrified at his own insane cruelty.

"For several hundred miles behind you the country is an uninhabited wilderness. Beyond that is a broad band, I am well informed, of unexplored desert. Escape by way of the sea is impossible. There is no port within hundreds of miles of where we now stand.

No ship, unless driven landward by a typhoon, ever passes within fifty miles of this beach. And, as you have just seen for yourself, closer approach through the shoals and reefs is possible only in the calmest weather. You are alone."

Quayle was as young in spirit as in years. His sullen rage now dissolved like the foul smoke of the yacht. Reason reasserted itself and he became practical. The instinct to live, no matter what the odds against his life, pricked him to immediate action. Each hour spent in that forsaken spot meant sixty minutes squandered in a grim battle where seconds might mark the margin between life and death. To stay where he had been marooned spelled a slow death by thirst and starvation. The packing cases of dried beef, canned fruits and vegetables and the rest—abundant hard tack, salt, and quinine—might easily last six months. Cutts had been loath to commit murder; he preferred, as a man of conscience, to let Nature take its course. And ruthless Nature was only too willing to be his accessory. The stout kegs of water in that keen salt air would be drained dry in six weeks. Quayle's eyes counted the casks again. He had made no mistake. There were exactly six. Unconsciously he passed his tongue over his lips, and a slow hand stole to his throat. "All hope abandon, ye who enter here," rang through his mind, and he knew that he had entered Hell.

Like a clean gift from Heaven his sense of humor returned. He thought of Cutts and laughed contemptuously.

"I shall get out of here, wherever it is. Then I shall put that ranting lunatic in his proper padded cell."

Startled by his own voice he looked warily around to see if he had been overheard.

"This is bad. That was the first symptom. I must not talk to myself again."

Sitting down in the warm sand beside the pyramid of provisions, he bent his whole mind to his desperate problem, oblivious of the wilderness about him and of the dreary thunder on the beach. He was out of space, out of time, alone with life and death in secret council. Which would yield? If neither, he must force them both by the sheer strength of intellect.

As he thought one hand stroked the close cropped brown hair, which curled slightly, back from his forehead. Sheila had liked to play with his hair. But he was not consciously mindful of the brave girl who had vowed that nothing but death should ever part them. Yesterday, when the yacht's barber shaved him and gave him a close haircut, his conscience had reproached him. For he had promised his sweetheart always to let his hair grow long enough to show its fascinating tendency to curl. Today, "cut off from intercourse with his fellow men," his conscience slept, and he thought only of six small casks and their cool elixir.

Rising to his feet he looked slowly up and down the endless beach.

"If I can find a dribble of water I am saved. The dry bed of a creek is second best. Which way?"

He could not decide. North looked no less barren than South. His hand fumbled at a pocket of his white duck trousers in search of a coin. Then he remembered that he had given his last silver dollar to the barber. There was no need aboard the yacht to carry a pocketful of small change. His hand came away empty. But, having made up his mind to invoke chance, he stuck to his decision. Unbuttoning his white flannel shirt he unfastened the small locket which hung from his neck by a thin gold chain. Civilization and reason were already slackening their iron grip. He was becoming primitive, half educated, a believer in luck and a brainless gambler with fate.

"Heads I go North, tails, South."

The locket flashed back the sun's hot gold and fell, cutting the sand at his feet. He carefully picked it up and opened the case. The trinket had fallen face down.

"South, is it?"

He turned the locket over and stared long and doubtfully at the beautiful features in the miniature. It was rather a sad face. Sheila veiled a high seriousness under her good spirits. The fashionable painter of miniatures had caught this elusive appeal and fixed it hauntingly in the violet eyes on the ivory.

"Your eyes don't seem to lie," he muttered. "Yet, if my intuition is right, I should go North. You say South. Which shall it be, Sheila? Shall I follow my own feeling and go North, or be guided South by you?"

The breakers thundered on the beach, speaking a

million tongues, but none that he might understand.

"If there is anything in reason I should go North. It must be cooler up that way. God help me, I am a reasoning animal. Where it is cooler there may be mists and perhaps rain. Is this forsaken hole far enough north for me to have any reasonable chance of striking across the belt of tropical storms? Cutts said this is the dry season. Do the monsoons ever sweep over this way? And if they do, how many months shall I have to wait for them? The water will last six weeks. If what Cutts said is true, I shall have rotted here five and a half months before the first drop of rain flattens itself on my carcass."

He scrutinized the sensitive features of the miniature.

"If only you could speak," he muttered, "then I might know from the sound of your voice whether you have inherited your father's great gift of lying."

His face hardened. Deliberately he dropped the miniature and ground it down with his heel, out of sight, into the sand.

"Good bye, Sheila dear. I'm going North."

He shook himself together, ran his hands reassuringly over his firm muscles, and set to work. First he tied the small dog tent which Cutts had considerately included in the stores, into a three-cornered bag. Then he packed in one of the water kegs and a good twenty pounds of canned provisions. The day was still young. Quayle glanced at his watch and made a rapid mental calculation.

"In six hours with this load I can make eighteen miles. After four hours' sleep I should trot back in three and a half hours. Then it will take another six hours to pack the second load up to the first. In eighty hours I can move all of the water and enough provisions eighteen miles north. The next eighteen miles north of that will go faster, for I shall have drunk some of the water. Allowing for delays I shall make a hundred miles, with all of the water that is left, and enough provisions, in three weeks. Then half the water will be gone. If by that time I have found no creek or river I shall keep on north as long as the fourth cask lasts, and then strike inland with the remaining two."

Hoisting the heavy bundle on his back he made his way down to the firmer sand by the breakers. Then, with a glance at the sky, he set his face to the North and slogged ahead.

Fourteen hours later, just as the setting sun turned the wet sands to greenish gold, he bent under his second load and turned North.

And so it went for twenty days. Back and forth, back and forth he trudged and staggered under his incubus to gain a miserly eighteen miles. From dawn to dawn became one hideous nightmare. Day blurred into night, and the pitiless void delivered him up to the merciless fires of a million suns. "Twice eighteen makes thirty-six, twice eighteen makes thirty-six; three times eighteen is fifty-four . . . six eighteens make a hundred and eight," ran the infernal mathematics in a brain that never slept. He dared not let

the torturing machine run down, lest he oversleep and lose count of his gains, eighteen miles by eighteen miles an eternity. When he flung himself down exhausted to sleep for the self-allotted four hours, he slaved under a burden that doubled with each step of his dream. "Twice eighteen is thirty-six; three times eighteen. . . ." Once, inebriated with fatigue, he strayed on for two hours beyond the appointed damnation. When he awoke, bathed in perspiration and shouting like a madman, he knew that he had been trudging for centuries over the sands of hell with a mountain on his back.

CHAPTER II

SHEILA

THE fourth cask was half empty when Quayle stumbled onto his Eldorado. His last cache lay only two miles behind him. This was his first lap on the relay which was to net him a hundred and fifty miles in his race with death by thirst. Long since had he ceased to be more than an automatic tramping machine, with a rudimentary brain that persisted interminably in hammering out the multiplication table. "Nine eighteens are a hundred and sixty-two; nine eighteens——," ran the terrible refrain, drowning with its metallic regularity the dull roar of the breakers.

Presently the machine stumbled and pitched headlong. The obstruction was a small polished boulder. Picking himself up, Quayle went on like an automaton, only to crash once more over a larger stone. His face grazed another, and he forgot everything, even the infinite arithmetic of the damned.

When his mind returned, in broad flickers at first like summer lightning, he imagined he was a vast bird sweeping majestically toward the sunset. Then, as the uncertain light steadied, he became aware of the crimson sky, blue green as a turquoise when he had been last

conscious of it, shimmering before his eyes like smoky blood. The mystery soon solved itself. He was not looking at the sky, but at a flat stone, and it was his own warm blood from a gash on his cheekbone which had shed the false sunset.

The wound was not serious. In a few minutes he sat upright and took in his strange surroundings. He became aware of two things. First, the multiplying machine in his head had stopped. Probably the impact of his fall had jarred the machinery out of gear. That alone was a relief beyond all measure. Quayle knew the infinite peace of the soul just released from ten million years of purgatory. But the second release from the torment was even greater. The eternal sands of his interminable marches had given way at last to a firm clay floor thickly studded with smooth, egg-shaped stones. For the first time since quitting his intended place of execution he smiled. The conglomerate of clay and polished stones reminded him of an indigestible English plum duff.

Not until he had struggled to his feet did the full significance of that stony pudding strike him. Then he relived the sensations of Balboa when, "lonely on a peak in Darien," he gazed out over the Pacific. The dry river bed of his forlorn quest lay broad and firm beneath his very feet.

Drunk with joy at his discovery he leapt shouting into the air. His primitive ecstasy became a paean of savage victory and a dance of triumph. Had he not defeated the most merciless of all enemies, brute Nature? Though he might yet walk through the

seventh hell he would not perish. Having endured thus far he could keep on, somehow, to the blessed springs or the silver rains which even then were marching to meet him. Far off, but certainly somewhere, rolled the unknown uplands which must nourish this dry river in its season of plenty. Some day he would stand on the peak of his middle age and look back with a smile over the inferno through whose hot mazes he was yet to blunder. The despairing comfort of the soul in torment whispered through his mind, "I see that all things come to an end." Even his thirst could not endure forever; it too must have an end. Though his days on the rack might yet be long, they would not last forever.

For although the clay floor was as dry as Gehenna, it was not the abandoned course of a forgotten river. The polished, egg-shaped stones, the sleek, grooved clay, the fine, sparse silt and the lack of dirt or rubble on the smooth surfaces all proclaimed the recent and repeated passage of violent torrents. This, as Cutts had kindly told him, was the dry season. Beyond all doubt that bare bed had been swept clean by rushing floods of sweet water less than twelve months ago. Far back in the invisible hills, or in the endless plains between their green slopes and the brackish ocean, must be bands of looser soil into which some of that torrential river had vanished. Did not the wild beasts of the veldt paw or hoof their way down through the loose dirt to water? What a beast can do by instinct a man can imitate by reason.

Sobering in his exultation, Quayle turned to the

three-cornered bag. How small and insignificant it seemed to have caused him such unremitting torture! This load consisted of the fourth water cask, now only about half full, and a scant twenty pounds of canned provisions. On starting his desperate search for a river, Quayle had planned to continue North so long as the fourth cask lasted, and then strike inland whether he had found his goal or not. If by good luck he struck the river before the fourth cask was drained, he had intended to follow up his salvation without an hour's delay. But now, in his first moment of release from torment, he became a sybarite. He would return immediately to his last cache for the remaining two casks and the necessary provisions. Then, having prepared everything for the final tussle with death, he would give himself up to an orgy of eating and luxurious drinking. So he planned. He would lie in that stony place until he had finished the fourth cask to the last sweet drop.

Before nightfall he had lugged up the two remaining casks and the provisions. Although his throat was a raging furnace he drank only a swallow of the delicious water. For he was weary to the very marrow of his bones, and he knew that even if his couch were a bed of coals he should sleep like the dead. To lie torpid for a night and a day with a skinful of water, and not be conscious of the ecstasy, was waste and sin. Therefore he refrained.

Having carefully wound up his watch he covered himself with the dog tent and closed his eyes. When next he opened them the sky was ablaze with stars.

By their phosphorescent light he saw that his watch had stopped. Before turning over for another nap he wound it up again.

His first sleep had been a stupor. Not so his second. He dreamt with curious vividness of drenching rains on far azure hills and of Sheila. Not once had he consciously thought of his sweetheart since he had ground her miniature into the sand. She had passed like a shadow from his mind. Now, like the white ghost of a shadow, she returned in a dream. And her silent presence was a more eloquent reproach than tears and words for his cold, reasoned lack of faith.

While awake and in full possession of himself, his rigid scientific reason crushed all faith in things that cannot be weighed or measured. Asleep, the thwarted aspirations of boyhood regained the upper hand, and the faith in things unseen which he had long since thrown to the winds, returned to brood over his dreams.

She stood and looked at him—clearly, and with the brightness of a vision, he saw her sad and loving smile. After a few moments she spoke.

"Why did you go North, David?" came the reproachful question.

"Why did you go North?" she persisted. "The rain is to the South. Less than fifty miles to the South of where you started there is a marsh. The marsh water is not fit to drink. But the creek which flows into the reeds is clean."

"How far would I have to walk to reach the creek?" he seemed in his dream to ask.

"About twenty miles from the edge of the marsh nearest the sea."

"Where does the creek rise?"

"In the green hills. It is always spring there. They have no name, for no white man has ever seen them."

In his dream his heart turned to her, and he knew that she had found the secret way through time and space to his soul.

"Sheila, I believe in you. It was someone else who threw away your miniature and trampled it into the sand. It was not really I. Tell me, when shall I find water?"

"I will not tell you."

"Why won't you tell me?" he queried.

"Because you would suffer."

"Then it is to be long. Shall I live to get out of this country, wherever it is?"

"Yes."

"Sweetheart," the dreamer went on, "tell me what to do."

"It is too late now to attempt the marsh. You have not water enough to return to your first starting place. And the marsh is almost fifty miles farther south."

"Then what am I to do?"

"March on up this dry river bed the minute you wake. Do not stay here until you have finished the fourth cask as you planned. You will need every drop."

"But how am I to carry two and a half kegs of water and enough provisions as well?"

"You must. I will help you. You will never forget

me, David. Wherever you go I shall follow, or walk by your side. I have found you here, and I shall know how to find you wherever you go."

Gradually her form began to waver and take on the characteristic vagueness of an ordinary dream. In a desperate effort to hold her there he exerted all his will-power.

"Wait!——"

But it was useless. Remorselessly, the daylight forced its way between his eyelids that fought to remain closed. A minute more and she had gone, and he was awake to pitiless reality.

CHAPTER III

EL DORADO

When Quayle had fully aroused himself the sun stood directly overhead. His watch had stopped again. As he wound it up and set the hands at noon, he had no memory of his dream. Only the luxurious sense of a deep rest and the anticipation of a long, cool orgy on half a keg of water before plunging once more into the inferno, filled his mind with a serene peace. Curiously enough, he noted, he felt no thirst. He had expected to wake raging. How long he had slept he could not guess, but it must have been over forty-eight hours.

The full sleep had refreshed him like the first deep draught of a chilled wine. New life throbbed through his veins, and new courage. Hell lay ahead of him. This he knew. Yet he felt that he could walk through it unscathed, barefoot if need be. Unconsciously he began to quote that pathetic boast of Henley's which has put manhood into more than one derelict:

"I am the master of my fate,
I am the Captain of my soul."

The empty words filled him with an insane power.

With a strangled oath he leapt raving to his feet and shook his knotted fists at the glittering sea:

"I AM the Captain of my fate,"

he shouted. "Do you hear, you . . . waves? You cut me off now from the world that I shall rule as it has never been ruled before, but I will make you pay. 'The sea is His, and He made it.' Hell! I shall unmake it! For every drop of drink you lying waves deny me I shall exact from the sea that breeds you like festering fish the ransom of a nation. 'Britannia rules the waves'? No, *I* rule the waves! what can all the navies of the world do against me? What are all their guns and rubbish against my weapons? Nothing! What are the sinews of war that the politicians blabber about? What? I have hamstrung them all!"

His last wild shout brought him to his senses.

"My God," he groaned, "that time I was almost out of my head. Oh, if only I could believe in something to make this endurable. But I can't. I know there is nothing. What's the good of praying?"

For perhaps two minutes he stood silent, his eyes vacant. Slowly they filled with an unreasoning hatred.

"When I get hold of Cutts," he spat through his teeth, "I shall kill him by years. Not by inches. Not by hours. No, by God! nor by months. That's too quick. I shall keep him alive and in hell for fifty years. With the help of science he can live and suffer

that long. He shall eat nothing but salt fish, dry hard-tack and enough green stuff to keep him in health. But he shall never have quite enough to drink. Just half a glass less than he craves will be right. I shall bring him to the point of death by thirst ten thousand times. Then my doctors shall save his life. For three weeks they will give him all the water he can drink. And I will order him to take exercise under my doctors' directions. He shall march just two yards more a day than the natural limit of his endurance. He shall drink salt water and eat sand. He——"

Once more an iron will took a grip on things. With a shudder of loathing Quayle shook himself together.

"I'm a ranting fool. This won't get me out of here. If Cutts was a theatrical ass I'm a melodrama. I wish old Barton were here to give me a thundering good kick where it would do most good."

Thoroughly disgusted with himself he set about the preparations for his feast. First he set out two cans of tomatoes and a tin of smoked beef. It was ten days since he had packed any kind of bread. Ship biscuit weighed too much for the meagre nourishment it provided. At this moment, as fate always goes, he yearned for nothing so much as for four slices of white bread, cut thick, with plenty of butter.

As delicately as a bridegroom loosening the girdle of his bride, Quayle opened the first tin of tomatoes. Then like an epicure he sipped, a swallow at a time, the flattish red liquid. It was almost as good as water. But not quite. God has made but one drink to quench thirst.

Next followed the smoked beef. This was a duty rather than a pleasure. For the last ten days food had grated on his palate. To choke down the necessary calories for his mule's job was a disgusting necessity.

He was just on the point of violating his second tin of tomatoes when he sensed the coolness of the atmosphere. Not a breath of wind stirred. The air was dead, or dying. The sun, barely past the zenith, blazed down its merciless torrents of molten silver unabated. Not a cloud shone in the vast, vivid sky. Yet the day was dead. The temperature had dropped perhaps five degrees. To a man of Quayle's scientific training the slight difference was perceptible and startlingly significant.

The unopened can, falling from his hands, struck a smooth stone embedded in the grooved clay, and bounded off, to bleed out its priceless red liquor unregarded.

Quayle lost all consciousness of his active thoughts. Long afterwards he recalled his profitless vigil in that tense half hour. The dry river bed on which he stood like a withered tree was forgotten. High overhead a merciless sun blazed and flickered, flickered and blazed, and passed from his ken. He knew only that he was a savage praying with every primitive nerve of his body for the supreme, the crystalline gift of Heaven, the life-giving rain.

Reason, science, fifteen years of cruel discipline fell from him like the shadows of cobwebs. He was a boy, a believer in fairies. Faith the inextinguishable,

that reasserts its iron law in earthquakes and in battle, ruled him with a rod of steel. He prayed aloud, unconscious of his petition. The man who in his sane moments was incapable of belief prayed with all the strength of his tortured body.

"Let it rain, and I will believe. If the rain comes I will forgive all my enemies. If it rains I swear to take no revenge on the man who condemned me to this, or on the civilization that he wishes to save. Send the rain, and I will forget everything, even my invention."

Who was he to dictate terms to the Maker of the sea? It was literally true that he could raise from the waves of the least of the oceans an absolute master of any civilization. In his madness there in the dry river bed he offered to barter this power for five minutes of rain. He felt what it means to gain the whole world and lose one's own soul.

Tense with expectancy he peered into the fathomless blue. Was that faint mist, far down in the western horizon above the sea, the white promise of a cloud? Yes! The first shimmer of mist took shape. Growing before his eyes it became tangible, though all but infinitely distant, till even now it was a plume of feathery silver. Faster than prayer, faster almost than thought, feather followed gleaming feather in the vast white wing which sheared up from the place of sunset and wheeled in a silvery cirrhus athwart the zenith. The sun was blotted out; the breeze passed about the watcher's feet and expired in a forlorn sigh not twenty yards from his place of agony.

Then, blessing of blessings, fell the rain. Two huge drops whitted down on the boulder at Quayle's feet. A third spattered itself flat on the back of his hand. That was all. The shower was over. Not even a breeze commemorated the mysterious dissolution of the clouds. In less than ten minutes the sky was barren and vastly deep, blue as a sapphire, cloudless as a diamond. In answer to his petition the rain had come. But it had not tarried.

A dirty red smear on the hard clay bore silent witness to the futility of hope. Without a word Quayle picked up the broken tin, wrenched it open, and devoured the tomato pulps. His zest for feasting was dead. Like a debauchee seeking dissipation by fixed habit rather than for pleasure, he pulled the bung from the half empty keg and hoisted it to his lips.

As he threw back his head a peculiar yellow glint flashed for a fraction of a second across his field of vision. Idly interested he lowered the keg and repeated the movement of his head. Again the bright yellow flash shot across his eyes. His curiosity aroused, he moved his head slowly up and down, trying to fix the source of the reflection. At last he succeeded. The flash was thrown back by a gleaming yellow streak on the clay no bigger than a willow leaf about forty feet from where he stood. Forgetting his intention to drink he walked over to examine the source of the strange light. Before reaching the streak he knew what it was. He had found gold.

The discovery roused him to savage mirth. This was the last gross insult. First the lying promise of rain

had tricked him. Now this mockery of useless wealth taunted him with its yellow sneer. Squatting down he rubbed up a pinch of the fine "flour" gold. Then, rising to his feet, he stood long in motionless dejection, staring moodily at the unknown sea which tossed endlessly between him and justice. With a low cry like a wounded animal's, half repressed rage, half hopeless despair, he flung up his arms and broke into a shout of laughter.

When sanity returned he idly searched about for further traces of gold. Twenty minutes of desultory prospecting proved beyond all doubt that this dry river bed was a natural gold pan of astounding richness. The winter floods had been washing down the fine gold from the invisible hills and plains for uncounted centuries. Here lay the treasure, thick as dust, waiting the advent of civilization with its efficient dredges and more efficient rot-gut. More than all his loneliness the flaunting virginity of that undiscovered El Dorado, incomparably richer than the sands of Alaska, drove home the terrible fact that he was indeed "cut off from intercourse with his fellow men." A goldfield richer than Kalgoorlie had flashed back its easy wealth to the blind sky for ages. His sickened eyes were the first to see and understand.

With a shrug he desisted from his prospecting. Once more he gazed long and disconsolately at the warring white and purple of the surf. His appetite for pleasure was dulled. The half empty cask no longer enticed him to luxury. By an inevitable chain

of associations the thought of the worthless gold at his feet recalled Cutts and his stilted farewell, and the words which had passed in the launch. Sheila's image flickered like a tired butterfly across his mind, but he dismissed it as an alien happiness beyond his grasp forever. Then suddenly the dream of his long sleep filtered down from the void blue.

"Perfectly natural," he muttered. "I have been planning for weeks to make one final dash with all the stuff I can carry. I shall need help, God knows. And here there is no human help possible. Therefore, true to the optimism of dreams, I imagined in my sleep that Sheila's presence in my memory would make the march easier. Will it? If I can sleep through it all, perhaps. Well, so much for dreams."

Reason had stealthily taken the upper hand. Sheila was a dim shadow in some half-forgotten existence. The lover had ceased thinking of the loved one's life as a part of his own. His way through time was one spiral, hers another, and the two lay long ages apart.

Without giving his dream a second thought he set about making a double sling to hang over his shoulders for his last dash. The two full kegs fitted well into their places, just balancing the third and the necessary provisions. On this final effort there were to be no caches and no relays. Day by day the heavy pack would grow lighter as the provisions were devoured and the water dwindled. In three or four days he could throw away the cask which was now but half

full. That alone would considerably lighten the burden.

As if in answer to his unspoken thought a clear voice seemed to echo through his very brain.

"Don't throw away a single cask when it is empty. You will need all three."

"Am I going mad?" he gasped. "I could have sworn I heard a voice. Let me get a hold on myself. This is only a case of subconscious auto-suggestion dramatizing itself. I must have reasoned out that I shall need the three empty casks. But why? What earthly use will they be?" Shall I trust my animal intuition, or shall I follow my reason?"

Struggling desperately to recall the forgotten chain of thought he seemed to hear the same voice again.

"Make haste," it insisted.

"I shall get out of here," he said firmly, "before I go insane. It is all clear enough. Probably at least a hundred miles of semi-desert lie between me and a permanent supply of water. There will be long dry marches between springs—if I find them. Yes, I must carry all three. Thank God for reason!"

The double sling lightened the grevious burden as much as it was possible. But the bare necessities of continued existence made the load that of a pack-horse. Turning his back on the sea he marched steadily off up the river bed, his strong frame bowed to its cruel load. A sudden glint of gold arrested his eyes and he paused irresolutely.

"I shall need half a ton of that stuff before I can settle with Cutts," he mused. "Well, there is no use

loading myself down with the trash at this stage of the game. Where that gold washed from there must be tons more. Later will do."

With a last glance of defiant despair at the sea he trudged on up the dry river bed.

CHAPTER IV

MERCY

THE reeling marcher had lost count of the days since water last passed his lips. His clothes festooned about him in clouts, and, his skin blackened and shiny like a bushman's, he labored on up the parched river bed, mechanically shoving one foot after the other. Fifty feet away on either side towered up the sheer russet banks of the dry watercourse. The floor of the inferno gleamed and flashed with thick patches of powdered gold, but the glazed eyes of the marcher were too tired to see. Listlessly as withered kelps his emaciated arms hung at his sides, too numb to fend off the empty casks beating at each step against week-old bruises. The springs he had dreamed of remained dreams. In his overwhelming weariness he was too tired for pain.

The first night after his water gave out Quayle had been tempted to destroy himself. Why did he not? His pocket-knife suggested the means. The instinct to live was all but dead. Nor did his conscience whisper that a shortcut out of his sufferings was cowardly. It was not.! Only housewives who have never been farther than ten miles from a tap will insist that a man should deliberately choose a "natural"

death by thirst when the key to a quicker release lies in his hand. Quayle refrained from suicide merely because he wished to inflict a torment tenfold greater than his own upon Cutts, the author of his misery. The hunger for revenge kept him alive.

When the first fires of the true thirst searched out his bones he wasted half a day in futile scratchings at the hardpan. Blunted flints were his only implements; not a stick of driftwood was to be found. He was in a region where timber is scarce, and where such trees as grow sparsely in the hills shed few branches. The inspiration to use the cask-staves as picks proved futile. All his panting and sweating to break one of the kegs came to nothing. The small boulders rebounded like tennis balls, and at last in dry despair he desisted. The beasts might puddle their way down to shallow wells; he, the civilized man, the far-seeing inventor, was less expert than an unreasoning brute.

Still rational he continued hopefully to burden himself with the three empty casks, consciously believing that he should find water. The true explanation of his care occurred to him much later. In his sleep he had reasoned out from the dimly sensed nature of his surroundings that he might have desperate need for this apparently useless luggage, only to forget the suggested chain of associations on awaking. When the last drops of water had trickled down his throat, he tied the three kegs securely into the double sling, hoisted them over his shoulder, and trudged ahead.

This sweltering day the air had been strangely still. From sunset to noon not a breath of wind stirred. It

was now about one o'clock. Only the rasping breath of the human machine broke the deathly stillness between the high red banks of the dry river.

Quayle was not thinking, for only the living think. His mind had died sixty hours after the last drop of water passed his lips. Presently the stumbling machine reeled, all but collapsed and came to a trembling halt.

An unbelievable tumult was rushing down the air toward the sea. In screeching clouds of purple and green it flashed overhead, flying before the invisible fury which pursued it from the distant hills. The air was a raucous rabble of millions upon millions of screaming birds. Looking up in a daze Quayle stared at the miracle in dumb bewilderment. These were the first living things his eyes had seen since they last rested on his enemy. All along the desolate beach of his terrible marches not once had a white-winged gull or any bird of the sea braved his loneliness. And the dry river bed was as dead as Gehenna. Even the thriftiest grasshopper requires a withered blade of grass now and then. Here there was no grass, nor had there ever been.

In four minutes the screeching blue and green panic had passed over him on its mad race to the sea. The sudden shock of seeing, for the first time in weeks, other creatures cursed with the spark of life, rekindled intelligence in the exhausted human machine. As yet he was too weak to reason, otherwise he must have guessed instantly what that tumultuous flight threatened. Like a baby with a bright new toy he could

only marvel that any birds on earth could be so poisonously green and so regally purple. What were they? Parakeets, suggested by boyhood visits to the zoological gardens, came to his mind. And with that first surmise came the sure guess as to his whereabouts.

Aware once more of the inferno in which he was condemned to suffer, Quayle noticed the unearthly pallor of the sky. Perhaps the contrast of the vermilion bluffs accentuated the strange glow, yet certainly the sunlit vault shimmered with a ghastly green light. The whole sky was suffused, it seemed, with a finely powdered greenish dust. And the waiting air was as still as the death chamber of a king.

Half a mile ahead the course of the river took one of its innumerable sharp turns. Fixing his eyes on the bend, Quayle shouldered his sling with the three useless kegs, and swore to make the half mile without a halt. The momentary awakening and the panic of the strange birds had refreshed him. He was now at least half a human being.

The meaning of that wild flight of birds struck him like a blow just as the torrid air, with startling suddenness, became chill as winter. Still there was no wind. Not a cloud flecked the milky green above. Yet the temperature shot down as if the sun had gone out. With a hoarse shout that strangled in his cracked throat, Quayle scrambled for the nearer bank of the river. He might as well have tried to climb out of a bottle. The smooth clay and perpendicular conglomerate offered neither clawhold nor foothold. At each attempt to ramp his way up the sheer wall of

the pit he gained perhaps three feet to lose it all the next second. He was trapped like a rat in a sewer.

Far off up the channel, miles beyond the turn ahead, he heard the rustle and angry shouting of an onrushing multitude. With every second the clamour doubled. It became a thunder that shook the hardpan beneath his feet and jarred down tiny trickles of parched sand from the sheer bank. Some ungovernable brute hurled and buffeted its gigantic shoulders against the angle in the river bed. In a second the infuriated monster had turned the corner. A churning wall of red water thirty feet high leapt and foamed its way down the channel. The floor smoked before the mad torrent, hissed, and was drowned. That was the last Quayle saw; a sudden volleying up of dust and mist before the flood smothered the world. Tramping, furious the deluge hurled itself upon him, stamped the breath out of his terrified body, and tossed him thirty feet up onto the curdling red froth. A litter of dead leaves swirled over him, a leafless branch dragged his shoulders under the churning millrace, but he floated, buoyed up by the three empty casks.

He opened his jaws till they cracked, and let the red water choke him: the pores of his skin drank in the liquid which his throat refused to swallow. To be drowned—oh, what a serene death! Could any creature that draws breath pray for a better?

But he was not to die by drowning. The casks which had bruised him till he bled, the last burden of his hellish marches, paid the fee of their cruel porter-

age. The frothing scum spun his body round and round like a cork and tossed it free of the bank.

Then came the wind, unheralded, its own trumpeter. The wrath from which the shrieking birds had fled in panic marched over the plains, leagues at a stride, to overtake the refugees before they reached the sea. The sky was blotted out in a blinding tempest of red hot dust, and the day blurred into a crimson night.

All that day, while the ember which was the sky still glowed, and the wind raced yelling toward the sea, Quayle soaked himself at the edge of the torrent. Night fell on the red tumult, and still he did not stir from his muddy paradise. To feel the water seeping into every pore of his body was the incredible miracle, the supreme good.

The gale lessened an hour or two before sunrise. And foot by foot the brick-red flood dwindled and dropped. By sunrise the air was dead. Only a dirty brown trickle meandering down the river bed remained of all the torrents which had brimmed its banks.

It was the most beautiful dawn that ever broke. The sodden man by the river bank, plastered and caked thick with red mud, and still grotesquely cluttered with his sling and casks, was the most beautiful thing in all that dawn, and the most beautiful that God ever made. For he was the incarnation of perfect happiness. To have starved and been fed, to have been a pauper and become rich, to have made thousands free by lavish gifts of money or of genius,—the joys of all these are trivial beside the infinite peace

which blesses the man who has thirsted to the brink of hell and been filled with water.

As he stood up and looked out over the rolling plain; Quayle thought of Sheila. For the first time he fully remembered his dream. Had she found the way to him down the shadowy avenues of sleep? Had she helped him in his hellish march? Had his mind once consciously held her image before him? He doubted. When a man is hourly in the presence of death for day after day, does he think of love? Certainly Quayle did not.

Then, for a moment, a curious speculation flashed across his mind, to be almost instantly extinguished by the black light of reason. Had Sheila inspired him to retain the three empty casks? Reason convinced him that she had nothing to do with his deliverance. The momentary doubt that she might have inspired him was preposterous, an old woman's tale, a belief for half-wits and credulous idiots. What could be more reasonable than that his own eyes, seeing the scoured river bed, had foreseen the deep channel and the probability of a sudden flood? Cloudbursts followed by torrential drainage are the rule, not the exception, in semi-arid tropical countries. He had not consciously reasoned out any of this. Rather his subconscious self had felt it, and directed him to keep the three kegs, in spite of his ache to be quit of them, long after they were dry. Dismissing the shadowy Sheila from his mind he became sanely practical. The immediate future filled his horizon. Sheila, as no doubt was her just due, got no credit for what she

might have done had it been possible. Quayle forgot her in the struggle for existence.

First he must find a way down to the muddy red dribble. His casks must be filled. Three hours' march brought him to a safe descent. In another hour he had filled the kegs and was up once more on the northern rim of the channel. Henceforth he would risk no sudden bout with death.

It was three days since he had tasted food. Until this moment hunger had not made itself felt; thirst held the mastery. Even now, sharply conscious of the new pang, he believed that he could go on for a week if he must. Had he not all the water he could drink? The hunger gnawed at his vitals like a devil. Was there nothing to eat in this forsaken place? A rubbish of sodden dead leaves caught his eye. They would at least fill his belly. With liberal draughts of muddy water he choked them down. The pungent oils of the leaves and their solid bulk were better than a six-course dinner. For the moment he was full. Adjusting his heavy load he tramped off, following the dying river.

CHAPTER V

FRIENDSHIP

THE inquisitive little man with the shiny chocolate face and the frizzly beard prodded Quayle with his spear. It was not much of a spear, merely a long straight eucalyptus stick tipped with a crudely whittled flint. At the third jab Quayle stirred in his nightmare and groaned. The little black man darted off as nimbly as a humming bird. He was scared half out of his wits, such as they were. The strange, half-human thing lying there was not dead. His first theory that it was the ghost of some peevish ancestor come back to plague him, might yet be correct. A black man ten or twelve degrees higher on the scale of civilization would have classified Quayle as a god. This little man's people had not yet imagined the gods. They were still groping their cautious way through the ghost stage of belief.

Scarcely breathing, Quayle slept on without a sound. His was the poisoned stupor of exhaustion. Unless he awoke soon and swallowed food he might sleep where he lay till his bones cracked to powder and blew away in dust to the sea. The bold warrior's panic gradually subsided. In twenty minutes his naked chest had stopped heaving, and his beady black

eyes no longer showed their chocolate whites. Half an inch at a time, stealthily as a panther, he squirmed toward his quarry. The true scientific spirit urged him to find out at any cost what sort of a being had dropped into his orderly world. He would investigate.

Quayle's shockingly dirty shirt and filthy trousers filled the little man with reverence and envy. Clothes, of course, were as incomprehensible to him as is the square root of minus one to an infant. To his envious eyes Quayle's unspeakable garments appeared as a fascinating new sort of skin. The proud wearer of such a skin must be a peacock among men. That is what he tried to think, only he had never heard of peacocks. Bejewelled parakeets and dingy lizards were his most intimate friends in the dry groves. Quayle, he concluded for the moment, was morally one of the gaudier parakeets.

If Quayle's artificial skin aroused the black man's envy, the battered remnants of his shoes inspired worship. What manner of ghostly being grew such beautiful feet? Each foot was a single toe, one and indivisible, instead of the normal five fat grubs. Had the reverent seeker after truth been several million steps higher on the ladder of progress, he might have burst into a rhapsody——

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messengers!" If he lived to the green old age of a hundred thousand he would explain to the psychologists all those curious allusions to "beautiful feet" that shine in the pages of the minor poets. For

poetry was stirring in his guileless black heart, and Quayle's utterly disreputable boots were its mystical parents.

It was fortunate for Quayle that he was a thing of beauty. The love that passes the love of women, the impersonal lust for beautiful things that causes millionaires to autograph fabulous cheques, was kicking lustily and raising no end of a rumpus in the little man's bosom. And with the naïve conceit of all male lovers from Adam to Abelard he glorified the target of his love with all of his own gratuitous emotions. Quayle's wretched boots became holy. They were beautiful vessels on the altar of love, sanctified by all the emotions which they could never possibly hold without slopping over, but which their humble worshipper poured into them by the bucketful.

From the lovely boots to Quayle himself was but an easy step, even for a bushman's limited intellect. In the black man's mind Quayle and his boots fused into one. The little man of the crinkly beard stood off and worshipped the prostrate sleeper, his sumptuously folded skin and his incomparable feet, with the timid devotion of a starved dog. Would the beautiful creature never wake?

Patience flourishes like a rank weed where there are neither printed books nor sophisticated brains for their understanding. An illiterate cat watches hours for the dilatory mouse to emerge, and a bushman squats for weeks at the feet of his dying friend, waiting for the ghost to come out.

The little man had brought his lunch. Like an

old biddy he settled down to make an honest Irish wake of the occasion. The gray skin wallet, stuffed with his week's luxuries, looked suspiciously like the pouch of a mother kangaroo. Whatever the abomination may have been it was not well seasoned. The advanced art of tanning had not been discovered by the blackman's unimaginative ancestors. They had simply hacked away with their sharpened stones at whatever took their fancy, and left the tanning, disinfection and the rest to the sun and winds. Consequently the little man's lunch was badly handicapped for a white man's stomach. Such as the lunch was, the bushman ate it with slow relish. Gobbets of suncured kangaroo meat gave body to the bird or two "preserved" in the same lazy way. Several handfuls of obscure, bitter-tasting roots supplied both pickles and vitamines. Last there was the unnameable dessert. This crowned the feast. It was the rosy garland of the bacchante. Why should we overfed pharisees hold up our hands and our noses at the dainties of humbler folk? The mere sight of our oysters on the halfshell would turn the stomach of any honest mountaineer. So why look down on the epicurean bushman who hoards the long, hardshelled brown grubs which he fossicks from among the roots for his custard?

The faithful watcher crunched away as quietly as was possible on such crusty fare. The beautiful creature beside him seemed scarcely to breathe. Would it never wake? Why not assist nature with a gentle kick? Reverently as a more enlightened heathen kissing the toe of his idol, the worshipper kicked his

adored one gently in the stomach. Quayle moaned and opened his eyes. He still slept. The black man nodded like a toy with a wire neck and showed his sound teeth. The sleeper closed his eyes, sighed, muttered a name that sounded like the wind, and drifted off toward the sunset. His worshipper administered a second kick, more vigorous than the first. The medicine hit the patient squarely in the diaphragm. Quayle coughed. This time the poisoned sleep dissolved.

Quayle's first impression was of two restless black cherries playing hide and seek in a jungle of silky black wire. This soon resolved itself into a pair of lively eyes, a frizzled mop of hair, and a kinky beard. Presently the primitive, undecayed teeth added their welcoming charm to the general friendliness.

Too weak to think, Quayle acted. He knew that he was dying of hunger and merciless thirst. The kegs having given out some days ago, he had thrown them and their useless sling away. No dream stayed his hand this time. He was swaying too dizzily on the sharp brink of death to bother with balancing feats. Terrible descents to the puddles of the river bed had given him both meat and drink—offals and red slime streaked richly with gold.

The stubborn pain to live is the last and most obstinate pang that dies in a man. By feeble gestures and inarticulate sounds Quayle made the bushman understand. A rancid slab of kangaroo fat was humbly offered, greedily snatched, and choked down. Dessert followed. The bitter roots were chewed but rejected. Then the fire of thirst took a firmer hold

on his throat and ate into it slowly, consumingly. Again the worshipper understood. Clutching his evil-smelling wallet he made off like a greyhound to his last water-hole, miles away in the eucalyptus grove.

It was dusk when he returned with about a pint of foul liquor. But that meagre drink was the sweetest that ever quenched the fires of hell in a dying man's throat. Quayle sucked the fusty pouch dry. Fed and watered, he rolled over and slept. The worshipper made obeisance to the blazing Southern Cross, why, he could not have explained, except that such was the age-old custom of his fathers before sleep. Then curling himself up like a tired but watchful dog, he took his humble station at the feet of his ideal.

Morning brought the sun and the shy bluebirds. These newcomers had given Quayle a wide berth in his desperate march up the river. The little black man was their patron saint and familiar companion. Therefore they twittered above his sleeping place, wheeling and curvetting as gracefully as swallows, until they awoke him.

The little man's first act was to smile at his friends. His second was to kick his ideal gently in the solar plexus. At the third hint Quayle struggled into a sitting posture. The bushman eagerly tendered rancid kangaroo fat and luscious grubs, but Quayle's stomach rebelled. Thirst speaks a universal language which the black man understood. Boldly lifting his ideal with one muscular arm, he grasped his ridiculous spear in his free hand, and tottered off, guiding his ideal to the place of water.

They reeled into the dry eucalyptus grove at sunset. By that time the little man's chest was laboring horribly, for he had carried and dragged his friend since mid-afternoon. The love of God is said to pass all understanding; the love of a harmless savage for his human god is a thing that only the Creator of all of us can understand. Quayle was not worth the half of it, but he got it all.

When night fell on the drooping trees, and the stark moonlight etched the rigid leaves against a sky of infinite sapphire, Quayle stirred in his blind stupor and woke. A pair of steadfast eyes, tenderer than a bride's and more adoring than a dog's, gazed down into his own with deep reassurance. He was safe. How, or by whom he had been saved, he cared not. He was too weary to think, too tired to doubt. In another moment he was off again, drifting over clouds and sea to the happy land of his love and his revenge.

For nearly three weeks the uncivilized child of nature waited hand and foot, head and heart on the brilliant scientist, the finest flower of an alien culture which not the greatest of all his tribe could ever hope to touch. Thousands of years before the bushman's children could fall into step with the onward march they would have been forgotten. Their pathetic spears might arrest the idle curiosity of stragglers in the white man's museums for centuries to come, but they and all their children's children would long since have passed the last ghost gate on the endless road which runs but one way. And yet this midge of a man, this lonely hunter of an ephemeral race, proved in

his unselfish cherishing of a helpless man that he had fathomed the secrets of eternity. No civilization, not even the highest as yet imagined, could have taught him a deeper love. The Red Cross no doubt could have given him some necessary facts about sanitation and the proper cleansing of the sick, but it could have taught him little that he did not know of charity. He had but little to give, and what little he had he needed desperately for his own sustenance, yet he offered it all without stint.

In the mornings he stole away with his absurd spear to seek the meat which kept the pitiful flame burning in his friend's body. Sometimes it was a baby kangaroo that he brought back, and then they feasted together. More often it was only a parakeet or a bluebird, and then Quayle ate alone. The little man did not starve. He merely dieted and went hungry. The grubs which Quayle refused kept the bushman's large soul in his dwindling body.

Quayle rested comfortably. His nameless friend had shredded down the long streamers of eucalyptus bark to the softness of virgin wool. All day the convalescent lay on his back, gazing up in the sheer joy of living at the unbelievable blue of the sky beyond the straight, sage-green tufts of the eucalyptus. The pungent aromas of fallen pods and dried leaves were an unguent to his tired body, and the absolute clarity of the cloudless sky blessed his parched eyes like the deep, cold emerald of an iceberg.

One flawless morning when his friend was miles away seeking to snare the swift parakeets and elusive

cockatoos, Quayle suddenly passed from convalescence to health. He determined then and there to bathe. The shallow water-hole offered, perhaps, two quarts of liquid black mud. At any rate it was wet. Flinging off his rotten garments the convalescent tottered down to the mud hole.

The little black man returned with two parakeets and a bleeding crow just as his idol swabbed the last smear of black mud off his chest. The evil smelling crow and the jewelled parakeets dropped like plummets from the paralyzed hands. With a twittering cry the humble worshipper threw up his arms and fled toward the setting sun. His god had skinned himself. The world was coming to a sudden and disastrous end. He had always known it would; his blind and toothless grandmother had told him so.

CHAPTER VI

PROFIT

THE fortune which one man can carry on his back in the form of gold dust is not large. To lug twenty thousand dollars in gold any considerable distance through a wilderness may sound easy, but it is impossible. Fifty pounds, or about sixteen thousand dollars, on a twelve hours' march is the limit of a strong man's pack. Quayle estimated that he must spend approximately two hundred thousand dollars to make his invention the "menace to civilization" that Cutts said it was. He dared not sell the secret—it was worth billions—or his just revenge would fall flat. To wreck the civilization which had bred Cutts, and with it the banker, had become his day-dream and his fixed idea.

Far into the night the outcast inventor lay flat on his back, staring up at the cross of stars which blazed down through the eucalyptus leaves. As the cross wheeled and flashed, falling with infinite slowness toward the west, he followed it with his eyes and wrestled with his desperate problem. He must get to a seaport. And he must take with him a dead-weight of at least two hundred thousand dollars in gold dust.

As a struggling inventor Quayle had not been able

to carry out his discovery on a practical scale. To raise funds he had sought help from Cutts, an old friend of his father. To satisfy the capitalist he had handed over certain blueprints, working drawings and fairly detailed specifications of the invention. From the latter Cutts formed a layman's opinion that the invention was indeed the epoch-making discovery that Quayle asserted it to be. He knew now of course that such a step was foolhardy, to say the least. The knowledge that he had made a fool of himself in trusting his father's friend did not soften his determination to undo his folly and the banker at one smash.

Cutts, having taken charge of the invention and appreciated its results, had lost no time and had squandered a fortune in trying to put the dangerous young inventor where he could do "civilization" no harm. The trip to the west coast of Australia had cost an appalling sum. First he had been obliged to pension the regular captain of his yacht—a particular friend of Sheila's—and take on a brandy-soak who demanded an outrageous salary for his services, although Cutts knew enough about the man through his agents to put him behind the bars for life. Then he had paid out a handsome fee to the broken-down doctor, since dead, in Singapore who signed Quayle's death certificate. And so it had gone. Money was no object. In view of what he had spent, Cutts felt that he deserved the privilege of saving the world.

Here, in the far bush, however, lay Quayle staring up at the trees, evolving his problem, while the first

hint of dawn dimmed the starry cross. How was he to carry back the necessary fortune to the civilization which, in cold blood, he now planned to wreck? He knew that he had been marooned on the desert coast of Westralia. The nearest seaport must be hundreds of miles away. To reach the sea was essential for his revenge. But how? Should he make his way alone through the wilderness and broadcast the news of his startling find? Here, at hand, was one of the richest undiscovered goldfields in the world. Two words from him would start a stampede. As he alone knew the way, the rush could go no faster than he chose to lead. In a month, with the proper tools, he could pan out a huge fortune. The transport back would then be easy. And once settled with a fortune in a great seaport he could command the apparatus he needed for his revenge.

The paling amethyst of the early dawn misted over and became a cool, deep sapphire. Just as the first coral flush fingered the vast bowl above him, a clear voice asked,

"Is it worth while?"

"Is what worth while?" he countered, taken off his guard. For the moment the voice was real, not an echo of his own conscience.

"Your revenge."

He started up, muttering. "Sheila again. I am still sick."

Not once in all his vigil had he thought of her. His enemy's daughter could find no rest in her sweetheart's mind while her father's hateful presence filled

it. Irritated by this awkward turn which he had not foreseen, Quayle shook himself together and walked down to the water-hole to drink and bathe his face. Refreshed, he calmly considered father and daughter in relation to himself and his future. With a shrug he dismissed Sheila. She should not come between him and her father. Perhaps after all Cutts had spoken the truth in the launch. Sheila may not have known her father's plans, but surely she had suspected his feelings toward her lover. She was intelligent and strangely sensitive to the moods of those about her. If not actively guilty she was passively culpable. Her love, he bitterly imagined, had never been more than skin deep, a sentimental rich girl and poor boy romance to flatter her vanity. Quayle would not soften. So long as cold reason held him level he would not swerve from a grim sort of justice. Cutts cried out for justice, and he should have it, no more, no less.

He started away from the water-hole, absorbed in his moody self-torture. A twig cracked to his left, and he turned sharply, to see his black friend timidly regarding him.

Revenge was forgotten in the joy of seeing once more that open, guileless face. As for the bushman, he was in transports. The evil apparition of the ghostly sunset time was only a dream. His glorious god had not skinned himself alive. There by the water-hole stood the beautiful one, perfect as a lizard, with the baggy folds of miraculous skin draped loosely about his knees just as they had always hung.

They began talking at once, each in his own tongue. That neither followed a single word of the other's impassioned jargon made no difference. They understood one another perfectly. The bushman gathered that Quayle had spent a most wretched night in his absence, and Quayle inferred that the black man had howled steadily at the stars for eight desolate hours. Their hitherto one-sided friendship became mutual and beautifully rounded. For one of them at least it was a rare experience.

Like many hard workers, Quayle was a man of few friendships. "Lucky" Barton of electronic fame had been his one intimate in the fast fading existence beyond the sea. The rest were pleasant enough fellows, and he liked them all, but they were not friends. Barton, with his loose morals and his brilliant mind that no amount of dissipation seemed to dull, stood out from the herd as a man worth knowing. It was interesting to see how he managed to keep ahead of the procession. And on his own account he was likeable in spite of his easy cynicism, or perhaps because of it. There was no sham about Barton. Whatever he did, good or bad, he did because he wished to do it.

At this moment a curious doubt flashed across Quayle's mind. Which of these two, Barton or the bushman, was the better man? He had never tested Barton. Their interests had not clashed. Barton took all the prizes, but that was legitimate. He had the better head. But in a real test would Barton put friendship before business, or was he too civilized?

There could be no doubt on that score of the black man. He would share the last grub in his soggy gray pouch with his friend.

Quayle deliberately decided that he would turn to good account the simple love of his primitive friend. With his superior intelligence he could swerve the black man's mind down whatever road he chose. His problem had solved itself. This kind-hearted, ignorant savage and all his tribe should love and fear him as a god, and drunk with worship they should sweat for the carrying out of his purpose.

With a cynical laugh at his own ingenuity, Quayle gave the black man to understand that he wished to be led to the tribe. Like all his race this black fellow had a splendidly shaped head with not much in it. So far as outward appearances went he might have posed for a bust of any of the greater Greek philosophers. Struck with the resemblance, Quayle dubbed the thick-headed little man Plato. Quayle had always admired Plato in the abstract. He now had a chance of showing his esteem in the concrete.

When Plato finally mastered his god's orders his face lost its dazzling smile. Must he share his beloved with others? Was not the beautiful lizard his own incarnate totem, to be loved and worshipped in secret? Quayle assisted him to solve his problem in ethics with a mild kick and a vigorous gesture.

"Get on, stupid!" he shouted. "Do you expect me to rot here?"

Seeing the beautiful god in a most ungodly red rage was the supreme ecstasy. Love that is not spiced

by a pinch of fear is only half a love, as many women learn by experience and most savages know by instinct. Jealousy was routed. Plato trotted briskly off, Quayle following.

Four days' jogging through the sparse scrub, or crackling over the dry bark of the straggling gums, brought them to the "village"—a dozen or so wretched hutches of bark and leaves cluttered about a mud-hole. A thin spiral of blue smoke ascending from a cone of white ashes gave the first promise of cooked food. What Plato killed on the march he shared with his friend as he himself would have eaten it, without benefit of fire.

Only the very aged made any use of the huts. In the dry season the majority of the tribe slept naked on the ground, or in shallow burrows in the gold-bearing dirt. When it rained they crawled under the skins of the animals they had devoured, or slept with their backs against the tree trunks and their hands clasped tentwise over their heads. This handful of humanity had not yet tasted the first blessings of true civilization. Centuries ago the stone age had paid them a brief visit and passed on, leaving them with just sufficient science to chip a flint and crudely fasten it to one end of a straight stick. The boomerangs of their first great inventors were still their most efficient weapons for knocking the luscious cockatoos off their airy perches, and a net of well-chewed gum fibres was still by all odds surer than a new-fangled spear to halt the romping wallaby.

As for pots or pans to steam their grubs, they

were the unconceived metaphors of that unimagined poet who should teach his people the proper use of mud. Pottery, basketry and other effeminate refinements of the effete cavemen were still a million years in this happy people's future. But let a rumor of the yellow dust in their sleeping burrows reach the outside world, and within two months the entire tribe would be bountifully blessed with tin pans and trousers, with calico petticoats and with tracts, with perishable crocks to ferment their innocent roots in, and with stout black bottles from which to swig; and, according to their merits, their newly discovered souls would be impartially saved or damned. Then indeed would they taste the blessings of civilization and become as gods.

Part of their complete savagery Quayle comprehended in the first glance, the rest he inferred during his four months' stay in the village. At the moment of his arrival the huts were deserted. The very ancient were fossicking for tidbits in the scrub. The very young had been carried off by their mothers to sprawl and kick to their heart's content while the fascinating search for edible roots intrigued their elders. Finding nothing to eat in the camp, Quayle lay down in the dust and went to sleep. He knew that he was safe, for these people killed only to eat. They were not yet sufficiently advanced to enjoy sport for its own sake.

When he awoke shortly before sundown, he found his friend Plato curled up like a dog at his side, sleeping the sweet sleep of the weary faithful. But he

and Plato were not alone. A round dozen of incredibly aged black folk, dumb as mummies, were trying to decipher the incredible evidence of their own bleared eyes. What had their mightiest hunter trapped this time? It might be a new species of kangaroo, but its childlike face with the beautiful yellow beard looked almost human. Quayle's roar of laughter at their solemn bewilderment sent them tottering. One old fellow with a magnificent head that Socrates might have envied, tripped over a dry twig, rolled into the nearest burrow, and lay there on his back, bawling and kicking like a baby in its bath. The others never stopped to help their fallen leader. His cries roused the slumbering Plato to the full capacity of his legs and his lungs.

By nimble skippings and impassioned declamation he corralled the stampeded patriarchs and in piping eloquence expounded the gospel of the beautiful lizard. When his love for the beautiful gave him drive, Plato could put a ringing punch into his evangelism. The multitude—twelve ancient souls—believed.

The immediate effect was pathetic. For a few minutes the converts dispersed, each man to his own hut or burrow. By ones and twos they tottered back, bearing in their palsied hands the meagre profits of their long day's labor. All this they offered without price to the stranger within their gates, knowing well that for them it meant going supperless to bed and breakfastless to work. The youngest was old enough to be Quayle's great-grandfather.

With all the graciousness at his command, Quayle

declined their tribute. He signified that he had feasted and was as full as an egg. The banked embers of the community fire had inspired him with a daring hope. Probably there would be roast wallaby or at least a seared cockatoo for dinner when the hunters returned. He felt that he could safely forego the lavish dessert.

Baffled by his lofty self denial, the elders withdrew to restore their wealth to the safekeeping of the huts. In a few minutes they were back, like bees at a white lily. While Plato lectured they cautiously verified his theory of the beautiful. The god gave himself up to be inspected. Humble hands lovingly fondled his sorry boots, and trusting fingers plucked at the miraculous skin which was only a manufactured shirt. Growing bolder, they even profaned the sanctity of his trousers, and several sought to pick golden souvenirs from the sunlike beard. Kindly but firmly the subject of the lecture intimated that his whiskers were his own. The audience took the hint and refrained from relic hunting. To a man they were gentlemen by nature.

A welcome diversion brought the lecture to a dramatic close. Plato's quick ears had detected the far off rumor of dinner. Laden with flesh and fowl and with dainties unmentionable the hunters were returning. With a whoop the lecturer summoned the elders to the holy office of fire building.

As the sun set and the smokeless flames from the eucalyptus tinder furled and unfurled in the still air, the whole population surged into the city. Men,

women and children, there were fully one hundred and fifty. This was the metropolis of a vast province, the temporary Rome of a vanishing race. Like Plato the men were well built, although not tall, and the massive heads of all were like those of Greek philosophers. Either their skulls must be abnormally thick or, as Quayle surmised, they had no more use for brains in their primitive life than they had for dress clothes, feather beds, missals and tin pans. Brains after all may have been greatly overestimated; uncounted millions get along well enough without any. The women were just women, nothing more nor less. That was obvious. Some of the youngest could smile pleasantly, but not seductively. So far as these belles of the bush were concerned, Sheila might sleep secure from jealousy.

The lecture began all over again. With redoubled enthusiasm Plato preached the good tidings of the descent of Art incarnate upon earth. Whence it had fallen he would not venture to say, although he evidently suspected the Southern Cross, just then blazing into glory. Quayle grew impatient. Stepping quietly forward he relieved an astonished hunter of his day's spoils, two emaciated crows and one plump cockatoo. The crows he discarded. In ten minutes with the aid of his pocket knife he had done to the cockatoo what fastidious civilization thinks necessary, and spitted the remains on the owner's spear. Then before their marvelling eyes he deftly roasted the bird in the embers. His friends and their fathers' fathers had used the fire chiefly to scare away prowlers of the night,

partly to take the chill off the early morning air. Not a word desecrated the miracle. Save for one hysterical sneeze, promptly rebuked by the bystanders, the transformation was accomplished in eerie silence.

Having satisfied his hunger, Quayle exhibited his knife, and by signs expressed his willingness to operate upon the cadaver of an adolescent wallaby which one of the women was hugging to her generous bosom. In an ecstasy of fearful joy she gave it up. What would the beautiful lizard make of her husband's prize? He made a luscious roast, although by firelight it was a long job and a messy one. Certain things were wasted, unnecessarily in the fascinated eyes of the onlookers, but it was the beautiful one's will, and the Heaven-descended was above criticism.

That juicy roast won their hearts. Each of the multitude received only a morsel, but it was enough. The succulent meat had an unaccustomed, clean flavor. It stuck to their fingers, that subtle taste, and with each licking conjured up the departed feast. The populace was Quayle's to do with as he pleased. Their last fear of him vanished when he roasted the gaffers' grubs like chestnuts, and personally inserted the popping morsels between the toothless old gums. The people had fed him; he would feed the people and incidentally initiate them into the proletarian delights of hard, merciless labor. That night they slept away their last ten hours of innocent idleness.

For four months Quayle held them in the hollow of his hand, instructing them in the arts of civilization. By making their work a game he taught them as one

might teach very young children. Docile as puppies, they learned to scrape the hard clay from the river bed, carry it to the water-holes, soften it, and pat the yielding mass into strange shapes. Under their task-master's guidance they built huger fires than the oldest of their tribe remembered, and into these roaring furnaces they poked the clay pots and long flat dishes to be baked into miraculous red brickware. Who but the beautiful lizard could have foreseen that a disreputable crow stewed in a red pot would become a juicy bird of paradise?

But Quayle's concern was not in teaching his humble friends the sublime art of cookery. That was merely a diversion to interest their stomachs, where they seemed to harbor their brains. The long flat dishes were his immediate object. After many failures he finally succeeded in getting the right materials to fuse into a glaze. The long dishes were complete; he now had several clumsy but efficient "cradles" for washing gold.

Lending his precious knife to the women he taught them to cut the kangaroo hides into thin strips, and with the strips weave together from other hides, suitably perforated, stout bags in which to carry his dust.

New water-holes were dug and the old deepened. The large sized pots were pressed into the service. Water was carried to the diggings, or the rich alluvial dirt was transported to the water-holes and there sluiced out in the glazed pans. The astounding richness of the goldfield more than compensated the crudeness of the machinery and the awkwardness of the

workers. While one half of the population hunted the other sluiced. The fare was scanty, but it kept the tribe alive. And that, so far as they were concerned, was all that interested Quayle.

It must have been within a few days of the morning when Quayle tied up his last bag of gold dust that Sheila planted the forget-me-nots on his grave in Singapore. For in that city Quayle had officially died of the bubonic plague several months before he got his first "color" in the crude earthenware cradles.

Part II
CIVILIZED

CHAPTER VII

LUCK

It was at the Lucerne Gold Conference, over three years before he ever dreamed of marooning Quayle, that Cutts began to fail, mentally, physically and morally.

It seems obvious now that had any competent alienist heard the sonorous "Thursday Morning Address" which settled the financial fate of France, he would have at least advised the famous banker, philanthropist and humanitarian to keep a strict watch on his health and avoid overwork. But the epoch-making Conference was attended only by statesmen and bankers, with a negligible sprinkling of generals whose names were on the world's tongue during the Great War. No psychiatrist or other expert in nervous disorders was present to warn the flaming orator.

Whatever else posterity may say of Cutts, it cannot justly deny that he was a financial genius of the very first magnitude. Where lesser men thought painfully in hundreds of millions, Cutts habitually, and as naturally as breathing, visualized billions. And this vaster scope was not mere bravado. His skilled fingers, toying with a pencil and a scrap of paper, had

a way of making capital breed upon itself that was uncanny. His very boldness, not to say his sheer rashness, was one of his soundest assets. Where more cautious men hesitated and drew back, Cutts, desperately cool, walked unafraid, and by his mere courage, appalling to his associates, annihilated his competitors who preferred to play safe. It was inevitable that this giant of the money market should be elected President of the Conference. When, at the conclusion of his address on that fateful Thursday morning, the great banker resumed his seat amid shouts, bravos and handclapping, he was as good as nominated to be the financial saviour of tottering France.

The delegates scarcely comprehended M. Poyère's speech when the elegant Frenchman, ornately seconded by his colleague, M. Dumès, proposed that Mr. Cutts be chosen head of the International Commission to restore the franc to its pre-war glory. Cutts was already elected; the balloting was but a tedious formality.

M. Poyère's motion made history not only for France but for Central Europe and for Russia. And through this tremendous chain of events the French banker's nomination of his American confrère also made history for an obscure genius, young David Quayle, just then battling with poverty that he might serve science. Through Quayle the historic motion of M. Poyère, seconded by M. Dumès, linked up the career of another young man of extraordinary talents with world affairs. But for M. Poyère's motion Joseph Barton, brilliant chemist, clear-headed cynic

and ingenious libertine, might never have had full play for his unique talents. In his own field Barton undoubtedly was as great a genius as Cutts. The banker excelled in philanthropy and finance, the chemist in swinish living and scientific research.

Many months passed in a concentrated fury of high speculation, and the historic Conference slowly receded into the shadowy limbo of accomplished things. Years before the time when the French bankers would call for the colossal gold reserve which was to rejuvenate the franc and save Europe from Bolshevism or at least from Marxian socialism, the massed yellow metal lay idly and unprofitably in the New York vaults of the Cutts' banks. The great financier had surpassed himself. Never before had such swift, merciless success been his. Throwing caution to the winds, brushing aside the remonstrances of his fellow bankers as the counsels of puling timidity, Cutts had triumphed supremely, gloriously, and now the idle gold proclaimed the wisdom of plunging and the sound strategy of taking a long chance. The aggressor wins—sometimes.

It is the cardinal principle of creative finance that capital shall be kept working. Idle money, like a buried talent, is sin. Those tons of gold in the New York vaults spoke a language which Cutts understood as his mother tongue. Their clamorous message, their pent-up urgency to increase and multiply, was reinforced a thousand-fold by the hungry cries of starving human hordes. Philanthropist and humanitarian that he was, Cutts heeded those siren voices and plunged

once more into the tempestuous waters of the world's troubled finance.

That the millions of Russia should perish for the lack of those things which only capital can supply, while the gold which was to redeem France lay barren, seemed to Cutts not only inhuman but stupid and immoral. Could the Russian masses be shown once for all the folly of their inefficient fools' paradise, they might be weaned forever from Bolshevism to become hardworking, self-respecting citizens of the world. It was a Heaven-sent opportunity not to be ignored. Cutts would obey the call of duty and save Russia from itself. By succoring the starving millions from Leningrad to Vladivostok he would demonstrate to the world that Capitalism is not the heartless devil which irresponsible Red orators and illogical dreamers proclaim it to be, but a potent spirit for the regeneration of an exhausted people.

There would be ample time to rescue Russia before Dumès and Poyère, in behalf of the French republic, claimed the promised gold to redeem the franc. A single season, the twelve months from one wheat sowing to the next, would suffice to convert the disillusioned, chaotic mass of discontent into a well-knit nation with its face toward a future of law, order and decency, and its back turned forever on the seductive abominations of Bolshevism and all its spawn.

Ruthless as never before Cutts dominated the money councils of his more timid associates. They admitted that he had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams in raising the gold to revive France, but they doubted the

wisdom of this new venture. He promised them wealth, and they wavered. With a fervent eloquence which carried him away he pictured the future of society should communism spread.

Need France be consulted? Cutts demanded. The gold would be forthcoming when the sister Republic stretched out her hand to receive her salvation. Eighteen months, or at most two years, was all he begged for to save Russia. They could not lose. Lose? They could not avoid doubling their capital! Reports, government, secret, and financial, were hurled at the doubters in a veritable barrage of persuasive optimism.

The plunger, the inordinate gambler, won the day with his last reserves. The critical, impartial and none too friendly Report of the Mowbray Commission of the British Government finally convinced the conservatives that they could safely follow their leader and, acting secretly through subordinate firms, replenish the depleted Russian factories with American machinery, ship farm implements to the steppes and to the Ukraine by ten thousand lots, sow the wheat fields of all Russia with a generous crop, and a year hence reap for themselves a justly earned profit of one hundred per cent. The deal went through, passed into secret history, and became the potential salvation of a great but deluded people.

Nature intervened. Months—possibly centuries—before the first American tractor kicked and bit the half frozen soil of the Ukraine, the fate of the colossal Cutts loan to the Soviet was decided. The tragedy

might easily have been foreseen and, so far at least as the House of Cutts was concerned, averted, had the astute banker included in his leisure distractions a little light scientific reading. Fully three years before the Lucerne Gold Conference the disquieting prediction of certain mathematical experts on long-time weather forecasting had been current gossip in scientific circles. But as Cutts read only sociological works as a recreation, all these alarming prognostications passed clean over his head. Not till Babson's and the other leading financial agencies got wind of what the men of science were confidently prophesying did Cutts hear of the flank attack which Nature was preparing against him.

The Russian loan was a fact. It could not be recalled. In a cold sweat Cutts telephoned for young Quayle, to ask him, as a man of scientific training, whether there was anything more alarming in Babson's reports than the evidence of a bilious imagination.

Quayle came at once. For years, ever since his early boyhood when his father died and confided his young son to the protection of Cutts, his lifelong friend, David Quayle had been a welcome and frequent visitor at the Cutts' mansion. Cutts treated Quayle almost as a son, and undoubtedly would have adopted him outright had not the young man's natural independence of character precluded such a step. Quayle was poor and he resented his poverty with a fierce pride. Only his deep love for Sheila, a love which was the slow, fine flower of years of mutual understanding, drew him oftener than his pride might have permitted to the house of his father's old friend.

His bitter poverty and his relentless ambition to achieve financial independence in order that he might give free rein to his inventive genius, bred a reserved shyness between himself and Sheila, the girl of boundless wealth. Although he would never have admitted it to himself even in his most secret thoughts, his poverty generated an inferiority complex in the presence of the girl whom, had she too been poor, he could have loved unreservedly.

Sheila knew that David loved her, and she was willing to wait until he overcame his reluctance to claiming what was already his. Her steadfast confidence in his genius was a salutary spur. By the sheer strength of his unaided intellect he would abolish the barrier between them and make himself her equal. It was a foolish pride, for Sheila was not tainted by the lust of money for its own sake, and she cared little or nothing for trash. Nevertheless it was a very real dragon in the young man's path. To save his self-respect he must slay the monster of poverty with a sword of gold.

When Quayle arrived in response to Cutts' summons, he found the banker nervously pacing back and forth behind the huge desk in his private office. As Cutts had intimated over the wire that he wished David's opinion on a scientific matter, Quayle seized the opportunity to ask a favor for himself. In exchange for whatever information the banker desired, Quayle planned asking him to consider his invention, but recently perfected, with a view to financing it and making it practical. He now deposited his roll of

blueprints and calculations on Cutts' desk and asked what he could do for this old friend of his father, his own kind protector, and the father of the girl he loved. Cutts handed him Babson's report with the scare article on the probable weather.

"Do you know anything about this?" the banker asked anxiously.

Quayle glanced at the title.

"Yes," he said, "I have been following Shaw's work for three years."

"Is there anything in it?"

"It hangs together."

Cutts plainly showed his worry.

"I wish I had heard of this a year ago," he muttered.

"All of the popular scientific periodicals have been full of it for the past three years," Quayle added. "Haven't you heard it discussed?"

"Not till yesterday, when this report came out," Cutts acknowledged. "I have no time for science. And even if I had," he continued with a trace of annoyance, "I should have paid no attention to this. You scientists are always letting off false alarms. But when Babson comes out and tells us to go easy, we listen. Babson is reliable."

"So I have heard," Quayle acknowledged with a smile. "Quite a triumph for science to be taken up by one of the greatest commercial agencies in the world. Well, if some of the others would follow Babson's lead we 'unpractical dreamers' might save

you big fellows a lot of money. We might even go farther and make you rich."

"But you can't make yourselves rich," Cutts objected cynically. "'Blind leaders of the blind,' is that it?"

"Not exactly," Quayle retorted with perfect good humor. "It is one thing to invent a machine for revolutionizing war or industry, and quite another thing to get it on the market. We need you fellows no less than you need us."

Cutts made no reply. For several seconds he stood staring moodily at the article in Babson's Report which had disturbed his peace.

"What does this man Shaw mean," he asked suddenly, "by saying 'there is a probable error of five years in the date?'"

"Simply this. The mathematical meteorologists have not yet sharpened their tools sufficiently to be able to predict a weather cycle with exact accuracy. When Shaw says that Europe almost certainly, and the whole world very probably, is to experience the coldest, wettest year since the Thirteenth Century, and fixes the date with a 'probable error' of five years, he merely means that he predicts only to within ten years. He dated his prediction three years ago, with a probable error of five years. That means now that within the next seven years we shall probably have the most disastrous year, all over the world, for crops since the middle of the Thirteenth Century."

"I don't believe it," Cutts objected with a weakly

defiant gesture. "How can it be possible to foresee the weather?"

Quayle laughed.

"If you don't object to a very mild scientific demonstration I can show you in ten minutes how it is done."

Cutts, fascinated, nodded, and Quayle unrolled his bundle in search of a blank sheet of squared paper. Having found what he wanted he rapidly sketched several sinuous curves, and proceeded briefly to explain their simple significance to the attentive banker.

"You know how to read a price curve," he began. "Well, these are drawn on exactly the same principle, only these describe the annual variations in temperature, rainfall, the number of sunspots, and several other relevant factors, as accurately as the scientists know them, over a long period of years. Notice the wavy regularity of these curves. Some of them repeat almost identically the same humps every thirty-four years; others run through their complete period in about a century and a quarter. Now compound all these curves—add together their total effects. Where a heavy rainfall and a low temperature come together late in the year, we have a record of a disaster for the farmers, short rations for the poor, and possibly a famine for an entire country. Well, just follow these laws—they are not exact, of course—clear back to the middle of the Thirteenth Century. What happens? All the bad features—from the farmers' point of view, come together at their maxima—the worst possible situation. And what did take place as a matter of recorded history? The whole of Europe

and most of Asia, the entire civilized world as then known in fact, had a complete failure of crops owing to rains which rotted the seed in the ground, frosts which killed the fruit trees, and snows which even all summer made the planting of vegetables impossible. These bumps coming together on all these curves are as plain a story of that Thirteenth Century famine as any that has come down to us.

"Now follow along the curves and see what they predict for the future. As you run down from the Thirteenth Century you see several other bad years repeated at fairly regular intervals. We have definite historical records of what actually took place in those years. They were famine-stricken, but not nearly so severely as that terrible year of the mid Thirteenth Century. Now, what does Shaw predict from following these graphic facts into the future? You can see it with your own eyes. The disastrous features—incessant cold and rain, practically no summer, and an autumn so wet that early planting is futile—all coalesce again, almost exactly as in the Thirteenth Century, somewhere about here."

Quayle sketched in rapidly the continuation of the curves, perfectly naturally and apparently in strict accordance with their established past. Cutts saw for himself. His mouth went dry, and he walked over to the water cooler to get himself a drink.

"How accurate is all this?" he demanded, rejoining Quayle at the desk.

"What Shaw says—to within five years on either side of the mathematically predicted date. That means

that within seven years from now we shall most likely be in for a world wide famine unless we lay up supplies while the crops are good."

"World wide? How do they know what happened in America in the Thirteenth Century?" Cutts objected suspiciously.

"They don't," Quayle admitted, "for the obvious reason that Columbus wasn't born when all this happened. Still, the growth rings of trees preserve a record of rainfall which tells us something. But, putting that aside, we must admit that Europe's prospects for a first class food shortage within seven years from now are pretty good. The agricultural countries—Russia especially—should be warned at once."

Cutts said nothing because he was speechless with unreasoning fear. If the Russian harvests failed, not only was Russia plunged into despair and possibly thrust back for centuries to sheer, brutal barbarism, but France also stood a fair chance of toppling headlong over the red brink of anarchy. With the French gold largely dissipated in the Russian venture the franc was doomed. It must be a horrible nightmare, this ghastly prediction in Babson's usually sober Report. Presently he would hear Sheila tapping on his bedroom door to ask whether he had gone to sleep again. Breakfast was waiting, and he would be late for his appointment at nine o'clock with Morgan, his general manager. With an uneasy effort he realized that Quayle was speaking, showing him some complicated papers covered with elaborate drawings and regiments of chemical equations.

"So I put it up to you squarely," the young man was saying, "whether or not you want to finance it. I estimate the cost of operating on a large commercial scale at about one million—say eight hundred thousand to begin. Of course we could make it pay like the deuce for much less. Two hundred thousand dollars would build a plant to operate on a two or three year control basis. Put in five times that amount and we bring the world to its knees, and to our mercy, in six months. What on earth can stand up against this once we get it going?"

"Control basis?" Cutts repeated in a daze. Quayle's flaming prophecy had passed unheard, or at least uncomprehended. In his stunned condition the banker simply had not grasped the colossal magnitude of this evil thing—to his ethics Quayle's invention could appear only as an unveiled and loathsome abomination—which the eager young inventor was pressing him to "develop on a fifty-fifty basis."

"Yes," Quayle insisted. "Don't you understand? We have the world in our hands. You can go on with your philanthropy—it has always been your real interest—and I can build the finest research chemical laboratory in the world. Then, with both our fortunes made—kings of the earth!—I shall not be ashamed to ask Sheila to marry me."

"Marry you? Are you mad?"

The banker shrank back from this glowing enthusiast, this proud young son of Lucifer whose flaming spark of the divine fire might well kindle a conflagration which would expire only with the last remnants

of the civilization which it consumed, as a ravenous flame devours dry straw. He was beginning to comprehend. Quayle's words had sunk into his consciousness, unknown to himself, and now he was feeling their full horror, more terrible in their half-understood import than the vivid nightmares of the dying in no-man's land.

"Why shouldn't she marry me?" Quayle persisted, his eyes rounding in astonishment. "She loves me. I know she does. And if you develop my invention —I am offering you half—I shall no longer be too poor to be decent."

"Explain it again," Cutts demanded thickly, struggling to rally his powers.

Quayle patiently began again with his blueprints, but Cutts brushed all that phase aside.

"You know I can't follow a word of what you are saying," he snapped. "I have no training in science. Tell me what this thing will do. What is its practical value?"

Again Quayle launched forth on a flaming prophecy of what his master invention might accomplish if perfected on a practical scale. Cutts followed the recital with a face of stone.

"The sanity, the happiness of hundreds of millions," he said slowly when Quayle finished, "mean nothing to you? To gain the whole world you would sell your own soul? David, I am sorry. What would your father say if he were living? And I promised him on his death-bed to see that you grew up into a good, upright man!"

"But what have I done?" Quayle protested. "This is simply a scientific invention. You and I can use it to——"

"Never!" the banker thundered. "What have you done? You have created a hellish device that will sweep whole nations into madness. You have begotten a more terrible monstrosity than all the fiendish engines, the gases and the flames, the airplane bombs, the torpedoes and the inhuman mines that your brother devils, the military chemists, spawned in the war. They wiped out an army or a shipful of helpless people with their hellishness; you would annihilate nations, civilization itself! If ever your terrible secret becomes known we shall sink down to brutal barbarism in five years. Think of it! For your own selfish gain you would imperil the security of the human race. You are a scourge of God and a menace to humanity!"

"Are the chemists to blame for the use politicians and humanists make of science?" Quayle flung back at him. "Explosives, poison gases and the rest are useful. It is the fools who abuse the good we give them who are to blame. Their mediaeval morality is five hundred years out of date. Science has gone forward; politics, ethics, international morality are still festering where they were when Galileo was born. Shall we chemists and the rest who can see straight hold back because the world is blind?"

Cutts stared at him with unconcealed aversion.

"In your heart of hearts you know that this invention is devilish and wicked. What would Sheila think of you if she knew?"

"Well, what would she think?" Quayle demanded with honest astonishment.

"You wish to marry her, and you understand her character so little as that ! She would run from you as if you had the plague. I know my daughter. She is a good girl."

Although Quayle did not fully credit Cutts' implied estimate of Sheila's mind, he was nevertheless disturbed. His morbid humility in the presence of wealth got the better of his sane common sense. If Sheila loved him as he believed she did, she would care little for an invention which her father declared to be unethical and inhuman, but which was neither good nor evil. Cutts to the contrary, this very invention, if intelligently used, might well mark the dawn of a higher civilization. Was he, the inventor, to blame if the world misused his gift? Sheila, he felt sure, was clear-eyed enough to see the abstract justice of his position. If she truly loved him, belief in him would follow as naturally as spring follows winter. But, after all, did she reciprocate his steadfast devotion? He was about to roll up his despised and condemned work when Cutts laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Let me take care of it, David," he begged. "I will lock it away in my private safe, and Sheila need never know what you have done. Trust me, I shall not breathe a word of this to her."

Quayle laughed shortly.

"You can't put my brain in your private safe."

"What do you mean?"

"If you lock these plans and rough drafts away I still have my head, haven't I? In six weeks I could restore every line of all this."

"But you won't, David?" the banker begged. "Think how it would hurt Sheila. I promise not to tamper with your work. Leave it here, in my older and more experienced hands, David, until you have made up your mind freely—as I know you will—to destroy every trace of it. Your invention must never run the danger of becoming public. Forget that you ever imagined it, and everything will come out all right."

"I can't forget that I am poor," Quayle retorted, bitterly.

The banker's pleading and his subtle appeal in Sheila's name had all but persuaded the young inventor to relinquish his masterpiece to the safekeeping of this older, wiser man who was the father of his sweetheart. Cutts' next words clinched the decision.

"Let it lie here for six months," he persisted, "until you have had time to think the whole thing through in all its bearings. You and I and Sheila can take a trip somewhere on the yacht and see what happens. If you have genius enough to invent this damnable thing you surely must have the talent to create some great labor-saving process that will free thousands from grinding toil and poverty. Think of the good a man with a mind like yours might do! Believe me, David, no woman who was ever worth a man's passing

regard has cared for a lover whose life was ruin and destruction. Let me put the infernal stuff away until you find your true self."

And, still doubting, but no longer protesting, Quayle saw the toil of four years safely locked away in a small wall safe by the north windows in Cutts' private office.

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As the year wore on it quickly became apparent that Babson's sensational prediction was to be verified. The "summerless year" has so recently passed into history that it is unnecessary to recall its miseries here. Europe was much harder hit than America, and Russia the hardest of all. Soon it became evident to the "Cutts crowd" that Russia must default. Their money, or rather a large swathe of the gold which was to have saved France, was seriously depleted by the sheer inability of the stricken Russians to redeem their heavy bonds. Cutts had gambled and lost.

It cannot be said that the great banker was downhearted. The hugest task of his life now faced him, and he flung himself upon it rejoicing. He was like a veteran gambler who has lost everything but his fountain pen. So long as the ink held out he could sign I.O.U.'s.

Italy was crying for gold. Soon Central Europe's voice joined the insistent clamor. The Italians, in Cutts' estimation, made more noise and had less logic than the solid, hard-working citizens of Central Europe.

In the well-reasoned appeal of the latter for help the gambler saw his chance. By pulling them out of the mire he might yet extricate himself and still go down in history as the financial saviour of the French people. His associates were inclined to hang back. At last, desperate over the losses which they saw no possible means of retrieving, they once more entrusted their fate to the capable, daring hands which so often before had plucked them from financial dishonor. But for certain technical details, Cutts declared, he saw his way clear to a sweeping victory. They trusted him because he was their one hope. Without his bold leadership they were already ruined; with it they might still retain their self-respect and redeem their promise to France. At the worst they could suffer no more than the ruin which stared them in the face.

Cutts, neglecting no precaution, decided to take expert technical advice from as disinterested a source as possible before acceding to the request of Central Europe. This time it was to be all or nothing. Barely enough of the promised French gold remained in the New York vaults after the Russian fiasco to finance this desperate, eleventh-hour gamble. Central Europe asked only a short time loan. The European agents had almost convinced Cutts that their vast project was feasible and a certain, crushing winner. Before taking the plunge which must make him or break him beyond all hope of recovery, Cutts would seek a dispassionate expert opinion. The whole "deal" turned upon an extremely simple matter of chemistry. Being no chemist, Cutts sought the estimate of the only chemist

he could trust absolutely. He called up Quayle and asked him to come to his private office.

It was Quayle's first visit to the office since Cutts had persuaded him to relinquish his dangerous blueprints and chemical calculations.

"They are still in there," Cutts remarked with an arch smile. "But that is not what I wished to talk about today. I have become interested in commercial chemistry—in a most practical, money-making way," he concluded with a jovial laugh.

"Yes?" Quayle queried.

"Wait till you hear," Cutts continued, as if he were playing an amusing game. "I've gone in for fertilizers."

"There will be a good market for all you have," Quayle remarked, "after last year's crop failures all over the world."

Cutts nodded.

"That was my thought too. What do you know about nitrates? How are they manufactured?"

Quayle briefly outlined the well-known process whereby nitric acid is made by means of the "flaming arc" electrically from the air, to be used later in the manufacturing of artificial nitrate fertilizers.

"Is it practical—cheap?" the banker demanded tensely.

"Why shouldn't it be? You get all the nitrogen you need from the air cost free. Water vapor in the form of steam is almost equally cheap. Put the two together by any of the standard methods I have described, and you have your nitric acid. With that

as the essential starting point you proceed to manufacture artificial fertilizer on a scale that competes with nature."

"So I have been led to believe. Now, as a practical chemist, David, do you believe that the artificial products can successfully hold the field against the natural? To put it concretely, would you risk money in a concern that proposed to drive natural fertilizers off the world market?"

"That depends. How big is this concern?"

"The biggest in the world."

"Then it certainly is not in the United States."

"No, it is in Central Europe."

"Wouldn't it be risking your capital to invest it now in one of the Central European States? Conditions are so unsettled over there, especially after the crop failures last year."

"I could manage that side of it provided I knew that these people can actually do what they say. What is your opinion? Can they, or can they not?"

"Who are they?"

"The B. F. T."

Quayle considered before replying.

"Really, Mr. Cutts," he began, "I should hate to advise you. This is not merely a question of chemistry, you see. Every working chemist of course knows who the B. F. T. are. As you say they are by far the biggest chemical manufacturers in the world, and have been for the past seventy years. We have nothing that can compete with them in any way. If they say they can drive natural fertilizers off the world

market I should be inclined to believe it as a scientific possibility. But I haven't the slightest idea how long it would take to do it. You see I am a research chemist on the purely scientific side. Your question demands a knowledge of business details which I do not possess. This is a problem for a technician—a commercial chemist who has the manufacturing end of the science at his finger tips. Why not consult one?"

"Whom can I trust?"

"I know a man whose opinion will be a hundred per cent good. He knows his business to the last notch—the best man in America."

"Who is he?"

"Barton, my room mate at college. You have often heard me speak of him—the most brilliant man of his college generation."

Cutts nodded. He had learned the principal fact which he wished to know. Mere solicitude concerning the probity of B. F. T. was not his whole anxiety. Cutts was a far-seeing man. For several weeks he had been pondering over Quayle's invention. To let Quayle know what he had been thinking was not in his present plans.

"How can I get in touch with this Barton?"

"Call him up at the Standard Chemicals. He is their chief research chemist."

The banker reached for the telephone.

"You will introduce me?" he asked, handing Quayle the instrument.

"All right," he assented with a laugh. "Only don't blame me if Barton gives you a short answer. Respect

doesn't exist in Joe's vocabulary. They know that at the Standard and keep out of his way. He has a devil of a tongue, I give you fair warning."

"I'll bear it in mind," Cutts smiled. "Provided a man knows his business I care little for his eccentricities."

When Quayle got his connection and heard Barton's voice at the other end, he briefly stated his business. He and Barton had seen but little of one another since college days, as Barton had gone into commercial work and high living while Quayle still clung to pure science and scanty fare.

"Sure I'll do your friend a favor," Barton agreed readily. "Hook him onto the line and I'll jerk it."

"Mr. Barton?" Cutts inquired. "This is Mr. Cutts, David's former guardian, speaking."

"Quayle needed a guardian," Barton laughed. "What can I do for you, Mr. Cutts?"

"I want you to tell me frankly what standing the B. F. T. people have among the chemical manufacturers of the world. You know whom I mean?"

"The European B. F. T.?"

"Yes. What is their standing?"

"The highest."

"They say they can run natural fertilizers off the world market with their artificial products, provided they have capital for development. Can they do it?"

"Easily, if they get what capital they need."

"Are they reliable?"

"Absolutely."

"Given the capital they ask, they say they can con-

trol the world market inside of eighteen months. How about that? Would you, as a commercial chemist, invest your own money in a concern that backed the B. F. T. to the limit of what they ask?"

"Give me half a chance!"

"There are no shares for sale to the public. In return for your information I will let you invest any amount up to one hundred thousand dollars. How much do you take?"

"I can only raise twelve thousand. Put in every cent of it. Thanks, Mr. Cutts."

"Don't mention it. Good-bye."

Cutts was again the iron-nerved Napoleon of high finance.

"You will excuse me now, David," he said, pressing a button for his general manager. "I must attend to some big business at once. Drop round tonight for dinner, won't you? Sheila has been asking why you stay away. Come early."

Thus cordially dismissed, Quayle took his leave just as Morgan entered. Cutts wasted no words.

"Close that deal with the B. F. T. at once. Go the limit. Give them all the gold they ask."

"No gold reserves for ourselves?" Morgan queried, showing his surprise.

"None."

With the forced calm of the inveterate gambler Cutts waved his general manager from the office and picked up Babson's latest Report. He had staked his all. This play was to net riches or ruin. The man of steel did not even breathe faster as he idly turned the

leaves, seeking items of interest. It was not the first time in his career that he had flung good money after bad. Always before he had won, so why not now? His nerve was as sound as ever although possibly, unknown to himself, his business judgment had long since been hopelessly atrophied. The Russian disaster would undoubtedly have warned a less incautious gambler to go easy.

When five o'clock came he put on his hat and walked briskly from the office, young as a boy, with the short, nervous "Cutts stride" which was famous from Wall Street to the Bourse.

Days wore into weeks, and Cutts grew younger, more dashing, even jocular. At his office the mornings passed pleasantly enough. Morgan, his general manager, brought him only the most encouraging reports. The B. F. T. had already declared war on natural fertilizers. Their vast arsenals of ammonium nitrate, manufactured at a ridiculously low cost from the air, were being rapidly converted into millions of tons of fertilizers. No sooner was one mountain of the basic material reduced and shipped, than two more, each vaster than the first, rose to take its place. The atmosphere was inexhaustible; the necessary nitrogen therefore could be obtained ad infinitum; a practical monopoly on hydro-electric power, expert labor and transportation, all purchased with Cutts' gold, stifled competition; it was only a matter of weeks until B. F. T. captured the world market on their own terms. The deluge of dividends began to flood the New York office.

Cutts was at the height of his glory. Before long he was to be an object of interest to more than one detective, he, the great banker who had always rather snubbed the police. Friends in France were interested in knowing just how prosperous he was. Soon they were to call in a famous detective bureau to aid them in their speculations. But for the moment Cutts sat comfortably on the top of the world, respected, grovelled to, and envied.

"I did pretty well that time, eh Morgan?" Cutts chuckled, soapily rubbing his hands. "Do you still think we need gold reserves for ourselves?"

"Not if it keeps up like this," Morgan admitted with a laugh. "Eight months ago I was croaking with the rest of them. We thought you had lost your grip. Give us eight months of what we're having now and we'll be able to buy Europe at the bargain counter."

"I had lost my grip, had I? They thought so. They were prophesying that the French bankers will break me when it comes to the gold payments sixteen months from now. 'Poor old Cutts is cornered at last.' They don't know poor old Cutts. I can settle that French affair next October, fourteen months ahead of time, if they need the gold. And from the way the franc keeps tumbling it looks as if the French would be pretty grateful to get the gold then instead of nearly a year and a half later. It will be 'poor old Cutts' that saves France from Bolshevism, not brave France that crowds 'poor old Cutts' onto the rocks. Well, I can afford to be magnanimous. I shan't say 'I told

you so.' You can take a week's vacation, if you like, Morgan."

If Cutts was jubilant that early August morning, "lucky" Barton was in transports. His twelve thousand which Cutts had invested for him in B. F. T. was now worth close on a quarter of a million. Borrowing freely on his prospects, Barton threw up his position with Standard Chemicals and, as he expressed it, began to live. More exactly he set out to demonstrate his kinship with the common pig. It is asserted by some biologists that the rat, the pig and man are the most closely allied in their adaptability to environment, their catholicity of tastes in food and genetic necessities, and in several other respects, of any trio of animals. Barton, in the true scientific spirit, began putting this wholesale assertion of fact to the crucial test of minute and diversified experiment. He was one of those exceptional geniuses who have no use whatever for their priceless talents beyond the swill which brains will buy. His mind was a diamond set in putty. To keep the putty moist he would pawn the diamond.

Gratitude on Barton's part and possibly farseeing curiosity on Cutts' begot a strange friendship between this oddly assorted pair. To give Cutts whatever justice is due him, it should not be assumed that his friendship with the dissolute Barton is evidence that at this early date he had already secretly made up his mind to "try out" Quayle's invention. With the B. F. T. flourishing like a weed there was no occasion

to resort to illegitimate means to gain control of the money world in order to "save France." Possibly the very dissimilarity between his own puritanical character and that of the caustic young cynic exercised a subtle attraction on the banker. It is not necessary to suppose that Cutts was privately flirting in his thoughts with the unclean thing for which he had lectured Quayle.

Barton for his part wisely modulated his frank outspokenness in the presence of his benefactor. Past master at sizing up his fellow sinners, he assumed as well as he could without altogether stifling his own breezy personality the bluff, good-natured rôle which he suspected would be pleasing to Cutts. Between debauches he frequently dropped into Cutts' private office to chat on whatever took his fancy, finance, chemical research, the vast fortune to be made by American enterprise when finally "big business" should awake to the possibilities in the chemical manufacturing game, and whatever odds and ends of current scientific gossip he guessed would interest the great financier. By such high class private vaudeville Barton undoubtedly hoped to obtain another financial tidbit as profitable as his twelve thousand dollars' worth of B. F. T. Cutts however showed little inclination to "come through." The wary chemist, secretly voting his benefactor a pompous old tightwad, bided his time, confident that sooner or later he should prevail on the self-satisfied banker to loosen up. The mere sop to his vanity, Barton reasoned, would be ample repayment to the banker for putting a good

thing in the way of his young friend. So he hung on and was not too sarcastic on the banker's hobbies.

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So the money-pigs continued feeding unmolested in their financial clover till 11:43 A.M., New York time, of August the nineteenth. Beginning at that instant, and continuing for fifteen minutes, all the seismographs of the world recorded an earthquake of unprecedented violence somewhere in Central Europe.

It was several days before the military police could approach the devastated country close enough to ascertain the damage caused by the "earthquake." The disturbance had evidently originated in the province formerly dominated by the B. F. T. Neither the vast chemical works nor the province longer existed. Where the province had been, a smoking crater gaped its jagged course down to the basalt of the earth's inner shell.

The vast mountains of ammonium nitrate—harmless enough stuff when handled in reasonable quantities, but more dangerous than dynamite when packed upon itself in million ton masses—had annihilated the crust of the earth for a radius of fifty miles. Such at any rate was the tentative theory put forward by the chemists. Long-nosed, scientifically uninformed statesmen, always smelling evil where there is only a dead mouse, hinted that B. F. T. had been manufacturing forbidden explosives on the sly. This impressive hole in the ground, they declared, was but the just rebuke administered by that uncompromising

angel who is alleged to have taken the League of Nations under his wing. This avenging spirit, they asserted, had caused some hundreds of thousands of innocent persons to lay down their lives, suddenly and without benefit of clergy, in order that the world at large might enjoy a horrible example.

Whatever may be the correct theory, the facts were sufficiently objective. The mighty B. F. T. and a large section of Central Europe had vanished, and with both of them Barton's prospective quarter million and all of Cutts' gold.

Barton's comment was brief. "Just my luck. It's back to the pen for me."

That afternoon he signed up again with Standard Chemicals as a research chemist at a slight advance over his previous salary, thanking his stars that when he had quit his job he had not told the general manager to go to hell.

Cutts read the news in his office. After he finally got the taste of ashes out of his mouth he became strangely calm. His confidential clerk stood by, ready for emergencies. The outcome was less distressing than might have been anticipated. Except for one queer statement, Cutts kept admirable control of himself and of his tongue.

"I worked to save civilization, and civilization has destroyed me. Now I must destroy civilization to save it."

The clerk made no comment. Keeping one wary eye on the banker's yellow face he went on with his pretense at work.

Presently Cutts rose and tottered toward a small wall safe. The clerk followed. If there was poison or a revolver in that safe he wished to be handy when the door was opened. Having made the combination with some difficulty, for his fingers refused to function efficiently, the banker opened the safe and extracted a thick roll of blueprints and another of manuscript. These together constituted all the drawings, chemical calculations and other specifications which Quayle had entrusted to the banker. It was from these and Quayle's verbal explanations that Cutts had mounted his high moral horse. The "scourge of God and a menace to humanity" phrase of his farewell address from the launch had flashed from the banker's tongue for the first time as he sat looking over these very blueprints and listening to Quayle's glowing prophecies. To the eyes of the confidential clerk all this dangerous stuff was just so much paper. He was merely a highly efficient secretary, not an expert chemist.

Seating himself at his desk by the north window, Cutts unrolled the blueprints. Five hours later he rose, baffled. His soul cried out for a collaborator. It required no psychologist to tell him the feelings of a young libertine who has possessed a quarter of a million one minute and nothing but an undesired job the next. He instructed his confidential clerk to ring up Barton's apartment.

The young chemist had just returned from an early dinner. Cutts' luck was still with him, for although as a financier he was beggared, he still had eight or

nine millions of his own salted away safe from corruption. Double Barton's salary with Standard Chemicals was the bait dangled for the young man's services as chemical expert in a new manufacturing project to recoup the B. F. T. disaster. Cutts was unbeatable.

CHAPTER VIII

FIRST AID

THE banker's appetite was not what it should have been. Lest Barton should arrive in his absence Cutts did not care to leave the office. Contenting himself with a sandwich and a glass of milk he composed himself to wait for his collaborator. He intended starting work the moment the young chemist showed up. Barton was due at about seven-thirty.

At six o'clock the head clerk, assuming from his employer's collected manner that the banker was now in a normal frame of mind and not contemplating suicide, took his departure. He had barely left when Quayle hurried in to see his father's old friend.

Whatever Cutts may have felt at this unforeseen intrusion, he betrayed nothing. His judgment had long since decayed, but his nerve was as firm as ever. The warm reception which he accorded Quayle is sufficient evidence that, to salvage his battered vanity, he had already decided to betray this young inventor, the son of his dead friend. It does not follow however that he had also determined at this time to put Quayle "out of the way" for good.

"Are you hard hit?" Quayle asked anxiously. "I

just heard about the explosion two hours ago, and came right over."

"Oh, the B. F. T., you mean?" Cutts parried offhandedly, as if the disaster had not the slightest importance for him personally. "Terrible loss of life, I hear. We shall be getting up a relief subscription immediately. In fact I am going to see some men presently to make necessary arrangements for financing the American aid."

He glanced pointedly at his watch. Barton should arrive within forty-five minutes.

"But what about your investment?" Quayle persisted.

"My investment?"

"Didn't you back the B. F. T. after all?"

"Oh," Cutts laughed, "I see what you mean. No, in spite of your friend Barton's advice our group finally decided against the B. F. T. for ourselves although I gladly enough helped the Pierpont crowd to raise their loan. It was a good cause. I regret exceedingly that they have lost practically their entire capital. No, just as luck—or sound judgment, if you like—would have it, we stayed out. It may interest you to know," he confided with a smile, "that our directors shared your own opinion regarding Central Europe. Like you they thought a heavy investment there at this time would be too speculative for a conservative firm like ours to countenance. Besides, it would have been unfair to my friend Poyère. So I passed it on to the Pierponts. Well," he said, again consulting his watch, "I must be running along to see

those men about the American relief. Come to dinner tomorrow evening, won't you? Sheila is not very well, I'm afraid. You will cheer her up."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"I trust not," the banker sighed. "But I shall insist that she go to Paris to consult Le Bon—the great nerve specialist, you know."

"She seemed all right last week," Quayle remarked.

"You don't see her so often as I do. She is nervous, moody—no real interest in life. I shall insist. It is my duty as her father. Then you and I can take a trip on the yacht somewhere as we planned, and pick her up in Paris."

Quayle brightened. Sheila's health was her father's pet fad. Cutts was always chasing her from one expensive specialist to another when, so far as Quayle could see, there was nothing the matter with her. The prospect of joining Sheila in Paris after his trip with her father, and the anticipated pleasure of her intimate companionship on the high seas, far from intruders, sent the blood tingling through his veins.

Cutts escorted him to the elevator. His appointment with the American relief, he averred, was in a friend's office on the next floor above. Accordingly they parted, Quayle to take the down elevator, Cutts ostensibly to ascend. No sooner was his young friend safely caged and on his downward way than the banker turned on his heel and walked leisurely back to his private office. The chemist was due now at any minute.

When Barton arrived he went straight to the point.

This time Cutts had called *him*. Therefore the banker was at a disadvantage. The princely salary offered over the telephone was conclusive evidence that the banker was "thoroughly up against it." The chemist seized his fatal advantage, determined to push it home to the hilt.

"You said you wished to begin work tonight. What's the program?"

Before replying Cutts scrutinized the man confronting him as he had not yet taken the trouble to do during their friendly chats. He found Joseph Barton a stocky, muscular man of about twenty-eight, with thick black hair, a close-clipped black mustache, and a brisk, energetic manner. This was the real Barton, not the affable companion of an idle afternoon. His face was that of a natural sensualist marred by intelligence. Without his superb intellect he would have been unique, the complete and perfect beast. His quick, nervous movements radiated energy and a boundless capacity for animal enjoyment. "The pride of life and the lust of the eye" were vividly heightened by the intellectual fire which but seldom attends them. If ever a man looked like Lucifer, in spite of his obvious sensuality, that man was Barton.

His tongue, as Cutts was presently to learn, could sting like a whip. To any, subordinates or employers, whose intelligence he despised, Barton could be merciless. His virtue was his fearlessness. So far, in his pleasant, jocular contacts with Cutts, the chemist had disguised this side of his personality because he was "playing" the banker for possible tips on the money

market. Quayle indeed had warned Cutts of the Barton tongue, but thus far the banker had not experienced its bitter venom. The president of Standard Chemicals could have testified eloquently had he been asked. More than once Barton's late employer had hastened from the laboratories, smarting under the lash of the chemist's contempt. Barton spared nobody when he was roused, and he was always pardoned because his brain was a mint.

Cutts studied the chemist's features. He sensed only the cynical hardness of the deep lines about the mouth, the alert eyes, and the indisputable ability of the man. So this, he mused, as he scanned the face questioning his, was David's college chum, the most brilliant chemist of his generation. Cutts socially, and Cutts as a business man, were two very different persons. In his pleasant chats with David's college friend the banker had not speculated deeply on Barton's technical attainments. Now, however, Barton's ability as a chemist was the all-important detail. Was he as great as David, backed by general report, asserted him to be? Cutts was well aware that money was the young man's god; Barton's broad hints had not passed unobserved. Well, he would pay him handsomely for his services. The fellow certainly looked as if he could keep his mouth shut for at least six months if need be.

His close study of the able face before him convinced the banker that he had not erred. This young genius, dissolute-looking though he might be, was the one man in a hundred million to aid the financier in

his delicate project. One simply cannot afford to be fastidious in the choice of tools when it is a question of saving civilization and one's own lifelong reputation for philanthropic honesty.

Had Cutts been fully in possession of his senses, and not distracted by the dull ache of his recent ruin, he might have hesitated a long time before sharing his dangerous secret with a second party, especially with so able a man as Barton. But, in spite of his cool demeanor before Quayle, the banker was desperate. At last, and for the first time in his long career as a gambler on a gigantic scale, he found himself fighting with his back to the wall and not a reputable weapon within reach.

All his life Cutts' vanity had been as dear to him as were his vast projects for the betterment of social conditions throughout the world, perhaps dearer. He had berated Quayle as "a scourge of God and a menace to humanity." Now, in order to save his face no less than civilization he must meticulously conceal his movements from the "scourge." To preserve the present social order and his self-esteem from destruction he must lean on a rotten reed because there was no other support to be had. The degeneration of his mental faculties had already proceeded so far that he actually believed himself capable of deceiving an intelligence like Barton's.

"The work tonight will be of a preliminary nature," Cutts announced in his best platform manner. He was bent on impressing his aide from the outset. "As you may have guessed, Mr. Barton," he continued

pompously, "I have just suffered a severe financial reverse. To recoup my losses in the B. F. T. disaster I have decided to enter the chemical manufacturing business. In fact, if I may say so without boasting, I have determined to corner the world market. From talks with you and my young friend Quayle I understand that America now has a unique opportunity in the chemical field. I shall grasp that opportunity to the fullest advantage." Suiting a gesture to his words, Cutts vigorously clenched his flabby right hand. "I have called you into consultation," he concluded with due solemnity, "because you have the reputation of being the ablest commercial chemist in America."

"It will take capital," Barton remarked laconically. "Chemical plants cost a pot of money. Muscle Shoals for instance, or Edgeware."

Cutts started. Why had Barton mentioned the very plants which were to have turned out millions of tons of war gases and explosives to shatter Europe, when the armistice rendered them useless? Had this alert chemist guessed his purpose of playing with what, to a mind like Cutts', was as dangerous as hell-fire? It was as if Barton had overheard his thoughts when he learned that the B. F. T. had ceased to exist. The chemist's face however was a polite blank. His remark had been only a coincidence. Cutts decided henceforth to keep in mind Shakespeare's observation that conscience makes cowards of us all, and to rise to courage by trampling on his conscience.

"I can supply sufficient capital," he said. "You will furnish the technical skill."

"Sure. What's the scheme?"

"Presently. You knew David very well while you were at the University?"

"Better than a brother."

"Did he ever confide in you?"

"What about? Girls? Bootleggers? Money? If you mean any of those, he didn't. Quayle and I got on fine together, but he never ran with my crowd. Damned good fellow though, David, even if I don't see him more than once or twice a year now that he's decided to live the simple life for the glory of science. He did a lot for me—morally, I mean, if you can call it that. Never even preached when I rolled in drunk on him at four in the morning. Only cursed occasionally. We used to call him the parson."

Cutts looked shocked. And he was. Among his other estimable qualities he was a one hundred per cent prude.

"When did you do your work?"

"Every day, like the rest. Though I ran with the crowd, I never went to bed without putting in six hours of hard licks, drunk or sober. They all counted, even the fuzziest of them, and I beat Quayle in the final honors. His head, I honestly believe, was better than mine. I was luckier, that's all. It would have done old Quayle good to go on a party—a wild one—once in a while."

Under any other circumstances Cutts would have lectured and dismissed this cynical young man on the spot. But, with his back to the wall, the ruined banker was forced to swallow his natural distaste. He rightly

guessed that Barton would keep fairly straight, so far at any rate as drink was concerned, while drawing his salary. Otherwise Standard Chemicals would not have tolerated him, despite his undeniable genius. Cutts continued to fish gingerly for the information he hoped to elicit without giving himself away completely before he ascertained just how far he could hoodwink this none too scrupulous young chemist.

"You and David followed the same specialty?"

"Not by a mile. Of course we took all the fundamental stuff together. But I branched off on organic, while David took up physical."

"Physical?" Cutts echoed in puzzled disappointment. "I understood from David that he was not wholly unsympathetic toward the practical side of chemistry. Precisely what was his specialty?"

"Colloids and electro-chemistry."

"You must remember I am no chemist."

"Well, Mr. Cutts," the obliging Barton elucidated, "the idea of electro-chemistry is simple. All it means is the application of electricity to chemistry. Silver plating, for instance, or this fairly new truck on the artificial production of nitrates by shooting electricity through the air—I needn't go into the details. B. F. T. was doing it. Colloids are things like glue, or jellies, or solutions of soap. The word comes from Greek 'kollos,' meaning glue. Get the idea?"

"I think so." Cutts hesitated, almost faltering over his next question. "Did David ever talk to you about his work?"

"Did he? I'll say he did. Used to keep me awake all morning with it."

"And do you recall its nature?"

"Sure I do. But why don't you ask Quayle himself? He's in town, I guess."

"You will see in a moment," Cutts replied, for the first time betraying a slight trace of anxiety.

Barton, expert chemist that he was, trained to detect all but imperceptible changes of color in the solutions in his test tubes, and equally skilled in the diagnosis of shady human emotions, instantly became alert. There was more, much more in this innocent business than he had suspected. Carefully disguising his sharp suspicions, he waited patiently for the banker to slip and put himself, body and soul, into what the young chemist sardonically thought were more capable hands.

"That's all right, Mr. Cutts," he said affably. "What was it you asked me?"

"Do you recall the character of David's work in chemistry?"

"Oh, yes. Sure. To put it so a layman can understand, Quayle was trying to invent a practical way of applying electric currents to colloids. He wanted to find a cheap method of getting out and collecting the solid matter from the colloid. That's only a very crude description, but it is the best I can do without stuffing a chemical dictionary down your throat."

The banker's eyes gleamed with an insane light. He was on the right track. Barton knew what he was talking about. Moreover, from the tone of the chem-

ist's remarks, he evidently did not think Quayle's ambition purely chimerical. David was indeed no mere dreamer. Trembling with anxiety Cutts as good as told Barton the whole story of his mean perfidy to Quayle.

"Did David succeed?" he all but whispered.

"Not that I ever heard."

Cutts seemed to consider. With several aces up his sleeve he felt that the deal was his. The only question now to be decided was in what order he should play his cards. Barton waited patiently, confident that his new employer would inadvertently produce at least five aces and so give himself away. He was not mistaken. The banker's atrophied judgment rendered him as blind to the competent, crafty crookedness of the man before him as if both his optic nerves were paralyzed.

"You would not consider such a technical success as David sought impossible?"

"Not at all," Barton admitted readily, narrowly watching his victim's face.

"Then," Cutts sighed, apparently making a clean breast of all his troubles, "I may as well go back and answer your question of a moment ago. I have been sorely tempted," he continued judiciously, "to take David into my confidence. As an expert on colloids and electro-chemistry he undoubtedly would be able to advise me in my present project, which concerns just those phases of industrial chemistry. But, if I may say so to his best friend without disloyalty, David

is not practical. He lacks business sense. His financial instincts, I should say, are rudimentary at best."

Barton nodded respectfully.

"I know," he agreed. "Quayle always was that way—the sort of fellow you read about in so-called scientific novels—great as a chemist, but in everyday affairs badly in need of a nurse. Such freaks do exist. In fact they are quite common in universities. Old Würzer was one. Quayle is another."

"Exactly," Cutts nodded. "So you will understand why I finally decided to engage you as consulting engineer in my new venture in preference to David. It was partly on his recommendation," Cutts smiled, "that I cast my decision. He said you are by all odds the foremost industrial chemical expert in America. I have spared no pains to verify that opinion."

Barton gracefully accepted what was no more than his just due.

"Good old Quayle," he laughed. "I'll do him a turn some day."

"Now," Cutts resumed briskly, "to get back to business. This technical difficulty that David was endeavoring to overcome has been completely mastered."

The banker paused for rhetorical effect, and he got it. The masterly look of incredulity on Barton's face was more stimulating than all the handclapping and bravos of the fatal Gold Conference at Lucerne.

"You mean to say," the chemist demanded, "that someone has actually found a practical way of precipitating the solid matter from any colloid—a method that spells dollars and cents?"

Cutts nodded.

"Then," Barton declared with perfect truth, "I am hearing the most important bit of commercial chemical news in a hundred years."

"Wait till you hear the rest," Cutts chuckled. "I own the invention!"

Barton stared. His acting was flawless. It would have deceived Cutts in his sharpest days. As a matter of fact the astute chemist not only saw clear through Cutts, but also half through the banker's grandiose project. The full kick of Cutts' duplicity however was yet to come. Barton not unnaturally jumped to the obvious but false conclusion that Cutts was planning to exploit this wonderful new process in a perfectly decent, normal way. He was yet to learn precisely what application of "electro-colloids" Cutts purposed in order to rehabilitate his beggared finances.

"You bought up the invention cheap?" he queried, knowing well that Cutts had done nothing of the kind.

"Not exactly. Let me tell you about it. As you may guess, a great House like ours is continually besieged by all manner of persons seeking to obtain financial backing for wildcat commercial ventures. Nor," he smiled, "are we immune from the attacks of cranks. Now it just happens that out of ten thousand impossible schemes there is usually one that is worth a second thought. In this particular instance, however, I must confess to the help of luck, if you like—some would call it softheartedness."

Noting the sympathetic approval on Barton's face,

Cutts offered him a fifty-cent cigar and lit one himself.

"About three years ago," he resumed, "a young man in the last stages of tuberculosis and destitution forced his way into this office. How he ever got past my secretary I am unable to guess. Well, to cut a long story short, the poor fellow begged me to finance his 'masterpiece.' As I was not busy that morning, I gave him four hours, going over the thing carefully with him. Although I am no chemist, his description of what his invention could do—in a practical way—greatly impressed me. I forced a hundred dollar bill on him—he was evidently at the point of starvation—and asked him to come back when he was feeling better. He took a receipt for his papers and promised to return, leaving me his address.

"Well, I heard nothing from him for a month. Guessing that the hundred must be about gone, I strolled round one evening after office hours to his lodging. I found the poor fellow at the point of death. His condition was pitiable, shocking. I got him to Colorado as fast as a special train could take him.

"Three months later he telegraphed begging me to see him before he died. Of course I went immediately. Something about the young fellow, so lonely there in the sanitarium—both his parents were dead—and so full of enthusiasm for his great discovery, almost made me feel as if I were losing my own son.

"I found him dying. Poor chap, he greatly exaggerated the little I had been able to do to make his last

days less miserable. Nothing would pacify him but that I should take his invention as a free gift, to be shared with the world for the good of humanity."

Cutts finished his recital with humid eyes. Barton's eyes also were suspiciously bright, but not with unshed tears.

"You patented the invention, of course?"

Cutts shook his head.

"Although I know next to nothing of chemistry," he admitted, "I do have a keen instinct for a tremendous potential success—in a financial way. This invention was not patented either by the inventor or by me because, as you yourself intimated a moment ago, it is the greatest piece of practical chemistry of the age. This discovery is one of those rare flashes of genius that should never be patented. In a word, it should never be made public in any form."

Barton shot his employer a curious look. He was not a mere chemist, but an extremely sophisticated young man with a sympathetic knowledge of the shady side of human nature that would have charmed old Machiavelli. What he did not know about the human fraud was not worth knowing. In playing his daring game Cutts had overshot the mark of common caution, and the chemist knew it. The cards, straight and crooked, now passed into Barton's more capable fist. In a flash he decided to play into this bungler's too confiding hands.

"I get you," he nodded sagely. "The invention was too valuable to be let out for any bootlegging chemist

to make moonshine money out of. The essential process must be easy. One man knowing it could make his fortune, or I miss my guess."

"Precisely," Cutts agreed. "I refrained from using it," he continued judiciously, "for the very reason you have indicated. But when the terrible B. F. T. disaster shocked the world like a bolt from Hell"—Cutts' meaning was plain enough although his metaphor was somewhat scrambled, "I saw in this neglected invention the Heaven-sent opportunity to deliver Europe from its red-handed oppressor."

"Oppressor?" Barton echoed invitingly.

"Yes! The scourge of God, the curse of Bolshevism!"

"I see," said Barton.

Indeed he was clearly seeing far more than the banker himself. To the chemist's critical, unsympathetic eye, Cutts began to appear as an egomaniac lunatic who, unless carefully directed, might well do the world of finance an irreparable injury. Barton, like the rest of America, well knew the Cutts' reputation for high, daring feats in the money market. He wondered whether the millions who hung upon this man's Jovian utterances concerning the almighty dollar, and whose very bread and butter likewise depended upon the soundness of those Olympian thunders, would sleep soundly could they see their prophet now, red-faced, filmy of eye, drunk with ignorant fanaticism. The evils which he denounced were beyond the present scope of his clouded mind. Cold reason, the one infallible remedy for overheated poli-

tics, simply was not in the Cutts' pharmacopœia. Blind passion alone now ruled the giant of Lucerne.

"You said over the telephone you plan going into the chemical manufacturing business on a large scale?" Barton asked lazily.

"So I recall. Also, you will remember, I repeated my intention when you first arrived." Cutts searched for the right words to make the full grandeur of his project sufficiently impressive. "I shall capture the world market and save Europe from itself, from ruin."

"By commercializing this invention you inherited?" Barton suggested, with just a tinge of irony on the last word.

Cutts rose to the bait.

"In part. I shall organize the All American Chemical Products Corporation to go on where the defunct B. F. T. left off. With no competition we can capture the world market in six months."

"How?" Barton demanded blankly.

"You shall see for yourself."

Cutts extracted the blueprints and manuscript from the wall safe, where he had locked them up again before Barton's arrival and, luckily, before Quayle dropped in to offer his unnecessary condolences on Cutts' "supposed" losses in the B. F. T.

To Barton's surprise the banker unrolled the diagrams and invited him to inspect them thoroughly. Was this an easy trap to test his honesty? Whatever respect he may have retained for Cutts' ability as a man of business now vanished in a curling wisp of withering contempt. The man was positively puerile.

He was not a scoundrel after all, but just an incompetent imbecile.

"I do not care," he said gravely, "to look into such valuable secrets unless you are satisfied that I am on the square. As a matter of fact, Mr. Cutts, you know nothing about me except what Quayle has told you, and that the Standard Chemicals people like my work. Hadn't we better come to some sort of an agreement before going farther? You might put me under bonds."

"Your simple pledge of loyalty and secrecy is all I ask."

"That suits me. You are taking no great risk. If I had been inclined to spill my employers' affairs the Standard Chemicals outfit would have given me the boot long ago. I shall keep my mouth shut."

"I am sure you will, Mr. Barton." Cutts meant the words literally. Cutts felt sure that Barton would keep his mouth shut, for the simple reason that he intended ultimately to take his cynical young collaborator on an extensive yacht trip. The farseeing banker had already discharged the regular captain of his yacht, replacing that faithful, upright servant by a brandy-soaked scoundrel who called himself Hansen. Whether or not he actually intended at this time to go as far as he eventually did with Quayle, there can be no dispute that he was fully *prepared* to go the limit.

Barton, be it recorded to his credit, was fully intending to play the game straight. According to his somewhat muddy lights, a fifty-fifty split on a crooked

deal is no more than a fair price for the golden gift of silence.

At a gesture from Cutts the chemist seated himself at the desk and plunged into the blueprints. One after another he scanned them at a glance and tossed them aside. In their general import they were plain enough. The details could be figured out later.

As his powerful mind gripped the problem before him, Barton became a different man. The divine spark in him overawed the natural beast, and for the moment he forgot his inordinate passions.

CHAPTER IX

BETRAYED

TENSE with greed and anxiety Cutts hovered about his collaborator.

"You grasp the young man's idea?" he ventured, as Barton laid the last blueprint on the pile.

"None of these contain anything startlingly new. They are just the plans for some sort of electro-chemical plant on a large scale."

"So my young friend explained," Cutts admitted cautiously, "at least so far as I was able to follow him."

"Did he have any definite idea of how much it would cost to finance such a plant?"

"He said about a million. Eight hundred thousand, he later thought, should suffice to get it going on a big scale."

"Rather a steep price to pay for a hobby," Barton remarked suggestively.

"So I thought," Cutts agreed. "In fact that is one of the reasons I have not moved sooner in the matter. But that poor boy's enthusiasm was so contagious, and he was so insistent as he lay dying out there in Colorado, that I finally capitulated and promised to

see his invention given to the world as he wished. What else could I do? The boy was already in the Valley of the Shadow."

"But," Barton objected with a trace of scorn in his tone, "you said you were going into this to recover your losses in the B. F. T."

Barton, or the flippant fiend in him, had decided to step into the open. The deliberate sting found its easy mark. Cutts stared at the chemist coldly, maliciously. It was the red dawn of hate.

"You do not understand my motives," he began, white with repressed passion, and trembling with rage that fate compelled him to bandy ethics with this dissolute libertine. "I am not robbing the dead." His incautious tongue, urged on by his lacerated vanity, was beginning to perform independently of his will. "That poor young man whom I helped to the best of my ability made me swear to give his invention to humanity, or at least to use it for the salvation of suffering millions. And how, I ask you," he demanded, his voice rising, "can I better discharge that sacred obligation than by using this invention to hold back civilization from the appalling chaos toward which it is rushing like a Niagara?"

For a moment Barton looked uneasy, but said nothing. A mere crook, no matter how clever, may be amenable to the discipline of a ruthless intellect, while a ranting madman will obey no command except the call of death. Barton began to wonder whether, after all, the game were in his hands. Cutts repeated his challenge with a cold, murderous fury.

"Am I not carrying out the inventor's dying request to its last letter?"

"Sure," Barton agreed, for the moment conciliatory. Almost instantly his contempt for the tense white face before him all but overmastered his cruel, calculating caution. "I didn't mean to insinuate anything, Mr. Cutts. But what," he inquired with an edge of acid scorn, "is all this about civilization going to hell? You don't happen to know of any more mountains of ammonium nitrate lying around loose, do you? A big chunk of Central Europe went up with the B. F. T., I admit, but that isn't going to end the world."

"No?" Cutts rejoined with a superior smile. "That shows how little you chemists know about cause and effect, about the present state of Europe, of the vast British Empire, of teeming Asia, and of our own United States. Let me tell you," he went on impressively, unaware of the soft sneer about the chemist's hard, reticent lips, "let me tell you, Mr. Barton, that only those blueprints and that roll of chemical calculations stand between us and world anarchy."

"You don't say," Barton scoffed. "How?"

Cutts lay like a lump of dough in Barton's hand and the chemist fully realized the soft weakness of his victim.

"A mere scientist like yourself," the banker explained with a patronizing smile, "can scarcely appreciate the magnitude of the issues involved, so I shall endeavor to be both brief and clear." Cutts was rapidly stropping himself into his incisive Gold Conference manner. "What happened to Russia when the ruble collapsed?

Ruin, starvation, Bolshevism! What has been the fate of Germany since the mark fell to less than the value of the paper on which it is printed by the hundred trillions? Strikes, bread riots, labor cabinets, loss of national honor, the red beginnings of Bolshevism! What will become of the vast, loose-jointed British Empire when the pound goes the way of the ruble and the mark? Ah, you begin to follow the argument. And what, I ask you, is in store for the United States when the dollar is dishonored? What?"

"You can search me."

Barton lit a cigarette. From what he had so far inspected of Quayle's blueprints he now began to suspect the banker's mysterious hints of an epoch-making discovery regarding electro-colloids as being on a par with his eccentric political theories. The man was merely a more or less harmless lunatic. Barton wondered whether he could intercept his letter of resignation before it reached the President of Standard Chemicals. And if not, would they take him back a second time? He had not treated them any too considerately.

"Anarchy!" the banker shouted.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Stop it! Arrest this red cancer before it chokes the heart of France. With France restored to sound financial health the progress of the disease is checked, and the civilized world is saved from an untimely death."

Barton began to shed the last rags of his patience. Quick to note his collaborator's unconcealed disgust,

Cutts took a firm grip on his emotions and moderated his voice.

"The International Gold Conference at Lucerne perfected the brilliant strategy which was to save France. I was elected President of the Council."

"What has all this to do with our business—if we have any?" Barton cut in savagely.

"Everything. Follow for a few moments and you will see. It was my duty as President," he resumed after an impressive pause, "to secure the French bankers the vast reserves of gold which they will require less than three years from now. Our campaign covered years, our policies looked far into the future, and we built, not for time, but for eternity. When those reserves are delivered to our sister republic the franc will be restored over night to its full pre-war value. I succeeded so well that all this enormous reserve was lying idle in our vaults over four years before the date on which it was to be shipped to Paris."

Barton became dimly aware of a new light. Cutts and his fellow gamblers had played fast and loose with the gold, and had scorched their sensitive fingers, how severely he could not yet guess. The situation was even less reputable than he had suspected. But why on earth was Cutts telling *him? He* was not "on the inside" of the international bankers' frolics. The man must be either drunk or crazy to blab all he knew. Already the banker had given sufficient evidence of an uncoördinated mind to warrant at least friendly supervision, but this latest confession bordered on im-

becility. Barton however was soon to learn that Cutts was less of a lunatic than he seemed. His insanity, if indeed it can be called by so unequivocal a name, was of the desirable kind that borders on genius.

"It is the first principle of progressive finance," the banker continued, "that capital be kept employed. So you will understand why we made short time loans to financially sound enterprises."

"I know nothing of business as such," Barton remarked. "But if your security was as sound as you say it was, I fail to see how you got skinned out of your money."

"Our security when we made the loans was unimpeachable. That is the point. Bolshevism destroyed it over night."

"You don't seem to have used horse sense," Barton retorted with callous frankness. Having long since guessed that Cutts, for reasons not yet fully clear, wished to impress him and to retain his services at all costs, Barton made no effort to conceal his contempt. "Even I should have known better than to lend a nickel to anyone in Russia. That was when you got caught, wasn't it?"

"I repeat that our security was as strong as Gibraltar. The Mowbray commission reported that the Soviet Government would go to any lengths to start the wheels of industry. The Belgian Commissioners made a similar report on the Ukraine. All that the Russians asked was seed wheat and machinery to sow and harvest the crops, and new installations in the factories. How could we foresee that the ignorant

mechanics, reds practically to a man, would refuse to touch the imported machines, or that the spring would be the coldest and wettest since the Thirteenth Century? The factories fell into ruin and the seed mildewed in the ground. Our total investment was a dead loss."

"Serve you damned well right. Your crowd had no business taking a fool's chance."

"We did it to help the starving millions of Russia!"

"Like hell you did. You gambled with the French money to make a little of your own on the side. Now, look here, Mr. Cutts. If I'm to work for you, we might as well understand each other from the jump. Five minutes after I entered this room I knew positively there was something off color about this whole business. Is that plain enough? Spill the beans, man! What's the dirt? I'm not squeamish. I'll do anything you say so long as you pay me what you promised, provided you don't ask me to do some fool thing that will get me into jail. Where do I come in on all this? And just where will I come out? I'm going home if you can't show me that you have enough left to pay my salary."

A crafty look crept into the banker's eyes. He ignored the chemist's blunt, disrespectful invitation to betray himself. But he did not forthwith kick the insulter out as any honest or sanely sensible man would have done.

"You will stay, I think, when you have heard the rest. Remember, it was you who advised me that the B. F. T. was a safe investment."

"Well, it was. Nobody could have foreseen the explosion. It had to happen first. Ammonium nitrate when packed in huge masses is a different affair from pound parcels of the same thing. Chemists and manufacturers had handled only small quantities of the stuff. The B. F. T. worked in million ton lots. My advice to invest was good, in spite of what happened."

"I am not reproaching you for having given the expert advice on which I lost the remainder of our gold reserve, and by far the greater part of it all. For I still am of the opinion, even considering all that has occurred, that your advice was excellent."

"You bet it was. I would take the same chance again myself, in spite of that quarter of a million that's gone flooey."

"I am offering you a better."

"I'll bite. What is it? Come through with the goods. I'm fed up on hot air."

"Develop this invention for electro-colloids on a commercial scale. From what my young friend told me, so little as two hundred thousand dollars will make his process a going concern. The eight hundred thousand was his estimate, as it was also yours, I judge, for full scale production. If necessary I can put in two million and speed up production over a thousand per cent. The process, I understood him to say, is cumulative. The longer it works the faster it goes. We can have the world market at our mercy six months after we get the plant well started. Then I shall recover all of my losses in Russia and the B. F. T. Months before it falls due, if all goes well, I shall

deliver to the French bankers the last ounce of their promised gold. To be perfectly safe, however, I shall ask for—and obtain—a slight extension of time from Dumès and Poyère. This I intend to cover by creating the All American Chemical Products Corporation. Every possible avenue of attack upon my project has been most painstakingly foreseen and guarded. With your technical skill directing the Corporation at the producing end I cannot fail. Our only possible competitor, the B. F. T. is out of existence. Their loss has been total. Not for a generation can Central Europe put another such plant on its feet in the field against us. The All American shall convince the most skeptical of its enemies that we indeed dominate the chemical industries of the world from this night henceforth. I shall save France, and saving France I shall save the world!"

"It sounds fine," Barton agreed, not in the least deceived by Cutts' strong playing up of the yet unborn All American, "but what is it all about? What is this world market you are going to corner? What do you plan to manufacture? Fertilizers?"

Cutts unconsciously glanced over his shoulder before venturing to reply. Then he leaned forward and whispered a single word.

At first Barton did not take it in. When he did he gave Cutts an openly suspicious glance and edged away. Cutts repeated the word.

"I heard what you said the first time," was Barton's disgusted comment. He got up to go. "You're as crazy as a bedbug."

Perspiration streamed down the banker's face. He was in agony to make himself understood and believed.

"Wait till you have seen the proofs."

"Nothing doing," Barton retorted. "I have a living to make for several nice young women. Do you think I'm as looney as you are?"

"I don't blame you," Cutts confessed, white with apprehension and the torturing desire to convince the one man in the world who could aid him to "save" civilization by putting it in imminent danger of destruction. "When that poor consumptive told me I thought he was delirious. But in those four hours that morning he finally convinced me that he was not out of his mind. It is the truth, I swear! The directions for doing it are all in there."

"Where?"

Cutts pointed with a shaking finger to the roll of chemical calculations. With a cynical laugh Barton picked up the papers.

"The scientific mind," he sneered, "condemns no theory without a fair trial by experiment and reason. If there is anything in what you say beyond the ravings of a consumptive kid with a temperature of 104, I'm willing to take a chance. This would have tempted Lucifer himself before he fell. 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained.' Here goes, headfirst for hell."

He resumed his seat and began reading. The first three pages he tossed aside after a few moments' inspection. Then he started. That slight start was the

only evidence of emotion which he permitted to escape his guard.

By the end of the third hour Cutts had grown hardened to suspense. He dared not interrupt the chemist for fear of severing some vital nerve of the reasoning. His gambler's brass came to his assistance, and he spent the remainder of that interminable night calmly figuring ways and means for launching the crushing All American Chemical Products Corporation. Only once did he break the palpitating silence, when he asked the janitor who appeared at six thirty to go away and sweep out the office later.

About half past seven Barton finished the last page of Quayle's manuscript. Inured by long years of such vigils he was as fresh as when he began.

"Well?" the banker asked, in a voice which he managed to control.

Barton gave him a searching look before replying.

"You win," he said shortly. "The stuff's here."

Nothing in the chemist's tone indicated to the banker that he had sold his soul to the devil, and that within five minutes he should begin to taste the fiery dregs of his damnation.

"Can the plant be arranged so that none of the staff but yourself will know the whole process?" Cutts asked anxiously.

"I expect so. It must. It shall."

"Then let us begin today. I shall snatch a nap and be ready at twelve."

"The All American Chemical Products Corporation

is to be merely a blind, I take it?" Barton inquired evenly.

"More or less," Cutts admitted. "I planned to mask our major operations behind the Corporation. The French bankers, Dumès and Poyère, will be easy to convince, I have no doubt, of the ability of the All American's earnings to meet their demands at the date agreed. If necessary I feel confident I can obtain an extension of time. The Corporation will be a visible, producing, money-making fact. Stock or bonds in the American will be gilt-edged security. Not a single human being beyond ourselves need ever suspect the nature of our real work. Our complete victory will be its only monument."

"Better get me appointed chemist-in-chief and director of the research laboratories of the All American as soon as you organize. It will avert suspicion."

"I had thought of that." Cutts agreed readily. "Well, you will need some sleep too before we begin."

"Not necessarily," Barton retorted coolly. "I'm as fresh as a dewy daisy."

"What do you intend doing?" Cutts demanded uneasily.

Barton eyed him sombrely, cruelly.

"Getting to the bottom of this at once," he replied with icy coldness. "Your young friend who died in your arms out in Colorado," he continued with frigid sarcasm, "was not the soft-headed idiot you thought him. Like the wise duck he was he forgot, when he left this wad of paper here, to include the whole story in his spec-

ifications. He knew it all, right enough. But he was not the proper sort of fool to put it all down in writing. He didn't fancy leaving a loaded bomb in your safe. So he took out the stuffing. See the point?"

Cutts lost control of himself.

"You lie!" he shouted. "You are stealing the invention to use for yourself."

"Then we're a pair. All that bunk you talked about the poor young man asking you 'to share his invention with the world for the good of humanity' is lies and piffle. Any man who would give this away, to the world or to you, would be a plain damned fool. He would be cutting his own throat, not only yours. And as for the 'good of humanity'—hell! Humanity might as well commit suicide if this thing ever gets out of our hands."

The mask had slipped, but it had not yet fallen. Cutts still seemed to believe he could brazen out the tragic farce with the aid of his trusty nerve. Although badly shaken he was not thrown. For the long years of an overstrained conscience and for a lifetime of ruthless bluffing he now paid the full price. He failed utterly to appraise the callous young man before him at his true worth. Having at last met his master, Cutts, blinded by the conceit which is usually born of lifelong success, failed to recognize him as such.

"What are you going to do?" he asked after an awkward pause, ignoring the cynical tone of Barton's remarks.

"Do?" the chemist retorted. "What can I do but

work with you? Two of us know about it now. If either of us ever slops over to a third party the game's up. We must find how the thing works and then run it just long enough to suit both of us. When that's done we must destroy every tank, every battery and cell, every plate and coil of copper, every brick and every last pipe in the whole plant, the buildings, and every scrap of these papers and drawings. As you hinted, this is to be a partnership. It is; I'll promise you that. I supply the brains, you shell out the money."

"Of course," Cutts hazarded, "you will have a fair share in any excess profits after we have fulfilled our obligation to France."

"Of course," Barton agreed with rather obvious irony which Cutts totally missed. "Provided," he added, like an inquisitor giving the thumbscrews an extra twist, "there are any profits to be shared."

Cutts blanched.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"Just this," Barton explained patiently. "Suppose our infernal secret—it is infernal, you will admit?—escapes from us. Then obviously you and I are mud. There is also the other possibility I indicated a moment ago. I may not be able to see my way through the missing details clearly enough to make the invention a success."

"But that possibility is remote, is it not?" Cutts suggested with a cringing smile.

Barton laughed.

"Sure," he said. "I'm not dumb."

"I am sure you are not," Cutts agreed warmly with

an unctuous approval which would have flattered almost anyone but Barton. "You already see your way clear through to the end."

Barton nodded.

"You bet I do." He carefully selected four sheets from among those covered with intricate chemical calculations. "I shall get busy this morning," he continued. "Before five o'clock this afternoon I shall have filled in all the details which your young friend forgot to mention. I'm going right over now to see Quayle."

"My God!" the banker groaned, and collapsed.

When Barton finally succeeded with the aid of liberal sprinklings of ice water from the cooler in bringing the wretched man to his senses, he was almost merciful. There was not a little of the sadist about Barton.

"Didn't you see," he questioned, "that I guessed at once who your young 'consumptive inventor' was? And did you suppose for a second that I would have forgotten Quayle's handwriting even if I haven't seen it since we were at the University together? I don't blame you for 'developing' Quayle's invention without his knowledge. This is no toy for an innocent like him to play with."

"You don't understand," the banker groaned. "I am doing this to save Europe—the world! from anarchy."

"Then why not ask Quayle," Barton insinuated, "instead of me to help you? It's a worthy cause, I'm sure."

Although Cutts might easily have satisfied his tormentor he simply could not bring himself to confess the humiliating truth. To acknowledge even to himself that he was about to assume the dastardly rôle of "a scourge of God and a menace to humanity" was too bitter a penance to be lightly undertaken. Instead of attempting the impossible and freely confessing the truth, Cutts clutched desperately at the first plausible lie which drifted into his mind.

"How could I have asked Quayle to help me? As you say, he is too inexperienced in affairs of the world to be trusted with a dangerous remedy like this. That is why I called you into consultation."

"And you have arranged, I suppose," Barton suggested grimly, "to put Quayle where he can't spy on us while we work his invention to an 'All American' finish?"

Thus nakedly confronted with his secret intention, Cutts was shocked. The mere clothing of a hideous truth in words not infrequently reveals for the first time its full deformity. The banker now realized for perhaps the first time precisely what was in his mind when he discharged the regular captain of his yacht to take on the brandy-soaked, utterly disreputable Hansen. To his credit it must be recorded that the banker turned from this revelation of his true self with a shudder of aversion. As a last feeble gesture of farewell to his departing decency he weakly denied any evil intent in his purposed dealings with Quayle.

"David and I," he muttered thickly, "are to take a yacht trip somewhere and pick up my daughter later

in Paris. I planned to keep in touch with the directors of the All American from the yacht by wireless and from ports of call by cable. Also," he continued, "I thought you might act as my personal agent in my absence. You understand the chemical business better than I do. The work could be finished before we return."

"Sure," Barton acquiesced. "Give me your power of attorney and I'll see that the All American gets a flying start. With your name backing the Corporation I can do a job like that in my sleep. Leave it to me. My waking moments will go on these." He tapped the blueprints. "The construction of the tanks is the first step—a good six months' job. And as for getting through before you two return, it is possible, no doubt, but I bet it doesn't happen."

"Quayle must never know," Cutts whispered.

"That's obvious," Barton laughed. "A third party could wreck the whole show over night. You and I are just ideal for working this game. I have the brains, you the capital. Either one without the other would be about as efficient as a paralyzed nigger without a head. It's up to you," he concluded with a meaning glance, "to see that Quayle doesn't interrupt us before we finish. Take him south where there are plenty of sharks——"

"Stop!"

"Well," Barton laughed, helping himself to one of Cutts' best cigars, "you needn't fly off the handle just because my sense of humor is different from yours. The whole thing is up to you. If Quayle prefers a

cold plunge for his morning dip, then by all means take him to the North Pole if you like. Only be sure he doesn't swim back before he's wanted. It would be damned awkward for us if he did, and not only for you and me but for France as well. Think of that. This is a case where the end justifies the means," he continued with an enigmatic smile, "if there ever was one outside of the writings of the fathers. It's up to you. Do whatever you think best, and I'll stick by you."

"There will be ample time," Cutts remarked, "to launch the All American before I sail."

Barton nodded.

"I have entire confidence in your judgment, Mr. Cutts." The mock respect in the chemist's tone passed for the real thing with the deluded banker. "Better go home now," Barton counselled, "and get that nap. The office force will be turning up in a few minutes. Pleasant dreams!"

Musing sombrely on ways and means Cutts stole into his mausoleum of a house and went straight to bed, to sleep as dreamlessly as the dead till late afternoon.

CHAPTER X

PARTNERS

FOURTEEN months had now passed since Sheila's return from Singapore. The keen edge of her first grief had been dulled by that simple act in the English cemetery, when she planted the wistful flowers on the supposed grave of her lover.

On her return to New York she drifted for some months into a profound melancholy. But youth is resilient. She overcame her disorder, not because the expensive specialists retained by her father gave her all their skill, but because she was young and healthy. Her dull apathy passed into a close-lipped reserve. It was as if she had said, "Never mention David's name to me again. All that part of my life died with him." And of all persons that her father wished to discuss, Quayle clamored the loudest for utterance. Fifty times a day the banker had to bite his lips to avoid the tacitly forbidden name. Quayle had said that it would be so. Possibly his prophecy had begotten the fact. He intended that it should.

Sheila's recovery was hastened by her father's obvious illness. Even his fellow directors of the All American Chemicals Corporation—all old associates of the battered financier—grew alarmed at the erratic ir-

regularities of the banker's judgment. He was no longer the quick man of unerring decisions that he had been in the days before the B. F. T. explosion forced him to the last, desperate ditch. Details seemed to oppress him, and sudden crises all but prostrated this shaken giant of the money world.

Although these lifelong companions in zealous finance willingly acknowledged the genius of Cutts in launching the All American, they openly expressed their doubts whether he, bordering on a nervous breakdown, was the right man to captain the huge corporation now that it had definitely begun its piratical career to capture the chemical markets of the world. In spite of his caustic tongue, they preferred Cutts' shadow, the brilliant, cynical young chemist Barton, who had so ably engineered the nascent Corporation during the banker's absence abroad. So well indeed had Barton succeeded in the great banker's absence that he and Cutts between them controlled fifty-one shares of the capital stock of the All American. Theirs was the controlling interest, but Barton was never uppish about it, except to Cutts. Given six months or a year Barton believed on good grounds that he could induce Cutts to part with most of his personal interest in the Corporation, if not to himself, then to "abler hands."

The directors backed Barton to a man. Was he not making them all multi-millionaires in record time? Cutts, they declared in their secret councils, had degenerated into a financial coward, afraid to trust his nerve on the safest gamble. Barton on the other hand,

knowing the chemical game to its last card, invariably advised plunging, and as invariably won. The chemist became the effective manipulator of the puppets; Cutts receded to the background where he played the part of a man of straw whose once great name lent the All American prestige in the public mind. With the rest the discarded leader profited handsomely by the change. Cutts' private fortune again became respectable, even in a community where eight figures is the price of a seat in the gallery.

Matters came rapidly to a head with the "friendly" unofficial visit of M. Poyère to the United States. It is one thing to resurrect a handful of defunct private fortunes, and quite another to raise an entire nation from the financially dead. Despite Cutts' assurances, reiterated by letter and by cable, that his group could and would deliver the gold promised to France on the extended date agreed, Dumès and Poyère became skeptical of Cutts' ability to pay. Ambassadors, international bankers and others of large affairs have means of ascertaining the truth denied to humbler mortals. The French secret service undoubtedly had got wind of the "unofficial" loan by Cutts to the B. F. T. of the gold which was to have rehabilitated the franc. Poyère and his associates now not unnaturally wished to know precisely how the House of Cutts intended repairing the sheer loss. They also were anxious to learn as privately as feasible exactly how much their American friends had dropped in Russia, for the secret service long since had uncovered the silent part played by Cutts in the generous

help accorded Russia by the bankers of the United States. In short the French had a pretty clear picture of the Cutts fiasco from its first bold stroke to its last, smashing, finishing touch.

When Poyère arrived Cutts almost willingly allowed himself to be ousted by his more energetic colleagues. They in turn did all that they could to encourage the singular friendship which sprung up like an unhealthy fungus between the caustic Barton and the polished, elegant Poyère. The shrewd Frenchman and the brilliant libertine had much in common besides their appreciation of good wines and better women. Poyère never permitted himself to be carried away by excesses when the franc was the main topic of discussion, and Barton, with considerate courtesy, invariably deferred to the tastes of his distinguished guest. They got along famously together, and somehow or another, for Barton refused to confide in Cutts exactly how the apparent miracle was accomplished, the chemist succeeded in persuading the critical Frenchman that he should have his money at the proper time.

"I convinced him that we have something good up our sleeves," was the gist of what he vouchsafed to Cutts, with just sufficient indefiniteness to throw the shaken banker into a hysterical panic.

"You told him?"

Barton smiled frankly, and nodded.

"Sure. I told him Quayle died of the bubonic plague out in Singapore. That was all right, wasn't it?"

The wretched man made no retort. Only his haggard eyes implored his tormentor for the mercy which he dared not beseech with his trembling lips.

"Poyère," Barton continued lightly, "thinks he's sharp. Maybe he is, as far as bankers go; I can't say. You and your dumb friends are the only other specimens of the breed I have ever had a chance to study under the microscope. He's not a bad sort when you get him going, and he's as witty as they make them. Don't you think it would be a delicate compliment to treat him and all of his merry countrymen to a one hundred per cent All American joke?"

"What do you mean?" the banker stammered, going white.

"Oh, nothing much. If you live long enough, you will see the thing itself. So why spoil a good story by telling it wrong end foremost? The cream of it is," he added reflectively, "I shall probably not live to hear the laugh. The greatest joke in the history of the world shall be my epitaph. Sad, isn't it?"

Cutts turned on his heel and walked slowly away without a word, tortured in every nerve of his body. This was not the first time his callous collaborator had stretched him on the rack. On returning from Westralia he found Barton still ostensibly endeavoring to supply the "missing details" in Quayle's chemical calculations. Barton professed to be baffled by certain technical difficulties, and Cutts had no means of proving him to be the liar which undoubtedly he was. To all of the banker's agonized appeals for speed, Barton replied with perfect sangfroid that everything

was going along as well as could be expected. Wasn't the All American shooting up like a toadstool? In its poisonous shadow they could carry out their secret sin against civilization secure from suspicion when the time came. Why fret? France would be saved, if not by endangering the whole world, then decently and by legitimate methods through the booty of the Corporation. With pencil and paper Cutts proved repeatedly to Barton that decency was out of the question. They must resort to the dangerous alternative —to the "scourge." To all of these feverish calculations the chemist replied by an indifferent shrug.

"I'll set you to work in ample time," he assured his timid collaborator. "Stop pestering me. I can't think straight with you fussing around me like a wet hen. Go and dry yourself on your friends—if you have any."

Cutts' friends at first felt sorry for this wreck of the strong man they had known and once respected. As his worries increased he began harking back to the imaginary causes of all his misfortunes. Instead of placing the blame squarely where it belonged, on his overweening self-confidence and on his shameless gambling with his clients' gold, Cutts began shifting it to any vague bogey within reach—the wrongheadedness of labor, the spread of Bolshevism, the bullheadedness of capital, the fecklessness of European statesmen and the crass obstinacy of war debt and reparations commissions. In season and out he preached his fatuous theories at any audience that would listen from pity or politeness. The result was inevitable. He be-

came an intolerable bore. Naturally his former friends shunned him as if he had the plague.

Given the cold shoulder by his late friends, Cutts turned with secret shame to the one haven where he was sure of love. Sheila was still to him the little girl he had fondled when she used to climb on his knee to beg for a bedtime story. He realized of course that she was grown up, a self-reliant woman, but she was still his baby and the lingering smile of his dead wife.

Although he never discussed business in her presence, Sheila guessed that all was not going well with her father. His hectic extravagances in costly and undesired gifts—ropes of perfectly matched pearls, unique opals, famous emeralds, specially-designed cars, a model sea-going yacht, the *Sheila,* for her private plaything, and expensive trash without limit which he loaded on her with the ostensible purpose of diverting her mind from its natural grief, irritated her at first and then alarmed her. There was unmistakably a sinister, irrational tinge to all this meaningless generosity. As a final fling of wanton extravagance Cutts re-engaged the former Captain of his own yacht, whom he had pensioned in favor of the drunken Hansen before the trip to Westralia, to take command of the *Sheila.* This man, a lifelong friend of Sheila, did not want the position, but Cutts insisted, bidding him up until he was forced to accept. To an outsider it seemed as if Cutts had a mania on the subject. Sheila began to suspect her father of playing a part to conceal from her some intensely disagreeable fact. What could it be?

By careful inquiries among her father's closest friends she gleaned that he was "losing his grip." Was he hard pressed financially? Well, no, not exactly. Not yet. Was he in danger of serious losses? The informant hastened to assure Miss Cutts that her father was doing very well indeed for the present. A rest was what Cutts needed—to get clean away from worrying about what this prying Frenchman Poyère might or might not do next. Then, with a freshened mind he could return to his business and take hold of the ticklish job at the right end.

"He is fagged out, Miss Cutts. Haven't you noticed how he has been losing weight? All he needs is a thorough rest to restore the old Cutts nerve to its full strength. Three years ago he could have handled this Chemical Combine, huge as it is, in his sleep. Really, there is no cause for him to worry as he does. This young Barton is a rare find. Not only is the man the best commercial chemist living, but he also has remarkable business judgment."

Sheila was not slow in carrying out her friend's suggestion. When a conservative business man talks out as plainly as had this cautious old hardshell, there must be more than fog in the wind. Her course, however, was not all plain sailing. Cutts demurred. They needed him "at the office," he asserted. But, Sheila gently objected, couldn't this young Mr. Barton attend to things in her father's absence? "All the directors" said he was most competent, and quite well able to look after the All American for a few weeks.

Cutts obstinately reiterated what he had said and

left Sheila a prey to anxiety. Unable to stand the inaction, she boldly went to interview Barton.

The chemist received his employer's daughter respectfully.

"What can I do for you, Miss Cutts?" he asked with businesslike directness.

She briefly explained the nature of her mission. Wouldn't Barton persuade her father that he could afford to take the much needed holiday?

While she was speaking, Barton watched her narrowly through drooping eyelids. Sheila was a strikingly beautiful young woman, with a charm and distinction of manner which Barton missed in most of his lady loves. Sheila for her part was fully aware of the chemist's appraising inspection, and naturally she rather resented his lack of courtesy. She was not sorry when her monologue came to an end. What it was that she disliked about the chemist she could not have said definitely, yet his whole personality repelled her. That he was coarse was obvious, but this, she instinctively realized, was not the fundamental cause of her dislike. She wondered secretly how this beast could ever have had anything in common with David.

"Sure," Barton agreed readily. "I shall be only too glad to help you out, Miss Cutts. The All American is doing famously—it could run by itself without touching for a year. I'll talk to Mr. Cutts when he comes in today—I'm expecting him sometime this afternoon."

Barton did talk to Cutts. For reasons of his own he welcomed this opportunity of ditching his "em-

ployer" for at least a few weeks. Cutts was getting badly on the chemist's nerves with his perpetual fidgets, and Barton wished to be left in peace that he might enjoy life in the company of the witty but unsuspecting Poyère. His philosophy began to emerge, even to Cutts. So long as the All American provided plenty of loot in the form of cheques from Cutts marked "for technical services," Barton felt no pressing urge to save France. The banker's growing anxiety had become an exasperating nuisance. Cutts' morbid terror of the future roused first Barton's contempt, then his cruelty. Whoever annoyed Barton was always made to suffer for the indiscretion. The banker's punishment was now long overdue.

Cutts drew the full bolt of his collaborator's fury with his first blundering attempt at diplomacy.

"Hadn't we better be setting about the construction of the plant?" he faltered.

"I shouldn't wonder," Barton agreed indifferently. "Poyère will raise no end of hell with the All American and with us too unless we make good on his promised gold. The time is getting pretty short."

"My Long Island place will do, as we agreed?"

"Ideal. You could supervise the initial stages yourself. Only," he added with a cruel smile, "I have other plans. Give me an order on your contractor for building the concrete tanks. And while you are about it, call up the newspaper men and ask them to send reporters to interview you. We've got to cover our tracks. There's nothing in the first stages that would give our game away even to a chemist. But we've got

to look out for six months from now. So you are going to donate an aquarium to the fish-loving public. Get the point? You have skinned suckers enough in your long career as a captain of finance to make it sound reasonable to the newspaper men. When you've given your interviews you can take the train for your winter home in Pasadena. Don't come back till I send for you."

"I shall not go to Pasadena!" Cutts retorted.

"No? I'll bet you do, for the very good reason I promised your daughter I would send you."

"My daughter? Oh, my God! What have you told her?"

"Nothing to what I will tell her unless you clear out for Pasadena. She was here this morning."

"I can't go!"

"You are going. Get that clear."

"We must work together," Cutts objected weakly after a long silence. "While you are conferring with Poyère and the directors I can be supervising the construction."

"In a way you are right," Barton admitted with mock generosity. "We've got to 'co-operate,' as you business men say. Isn't co-operation a grand and glorious feeling when it's tried on yourself? Let us understand one another clearly this time. I'll do some fancy stunts on your hide for all the co-operating Standard Chemicals did on mine before you 'called me into consultation' on the B. F. T. You and I are now co-operating to 'save civilization.' I put up the brains and you shell out the money. That's all you've

got to do, Mr. Cutts. See? And you might as well make sure now that you don't fall down on your end of the job while you're hibernating in Pasadena. You've done pretty well so far. Keep it up. Write me a check for two years' salary in advance. Mark it like the others 'for technical services.' Got your pen handy?"

"You damned blackmailer!"

"No pet names, please," Barton admonished ominously. "I'm getting fed up on your tantrums. If you will pardon me for pointing it out again for about the thousandth time, you have hanged yourself. Of course you had to hire the brains to help you on a job like this. I see that. But why did you take such a fool's chance at all?"

Cutts favored his collaborator with a glare of murderous hatred.

"My motives," he snarled, "are beyond your comprehension. I have been swayed always only by my desire to see humanity made perfect. My error, I now see when it is too late, was in thinking that you too were capable of unselfish ideals, and that you would be content with a generous fee for your services. Have I ever sought in this whole matter for personal gain? My one thought has been, and is, the salvation of France, and therefore of civilization, come what may!"

"Yes," Barton taunted, "and if I spill over, both you and France are smashed like a couple of rotten eggs against a barndoor. Why in the name of common-sense were you fool enough to trust anyone?

Couldn't you see you were putting your head under a trip hammer? I honestly believe you have been crazy for the past five years. You are going to make yourself scarce from this part of the world before you blab everything you know to our directors or to Poyère. That's one reason you're going to Pasadena."

A look of insane cunning stole over the banker's face, and a barely noticeable slaver of saliva appeared at the corners of his mouth.

"The civilization that I wished to save has ruined me. I will ruin civilization."

Barton laughed contemptuously.

"I'm not ass enough to believe that you are as dippy as you pretend. You know what you're doing. But for the sake of argument I'll suppose you mean what you say. Now, even if you are the nut you make out, you must get Quayle's invention going before you can begin on civilization. And to do that you'll need me. I have not only the brains but the blueprints and all of Quayle's calculations. So, whichever way it goes, I get my money. And a lot more into the bargain; don't forget that. I don't think," he said with sinister emphasis, "you will *want* to give away the process when I finally work out the details and start operating on a big scale. You will find you are not built that way. Neither am I. And to prevent a possible clash of two strong wills," he continued ironically, "I shall take special pains to see that you are not unduly tempted. Do you get the point?"

Cutts dumbly shook his head.

"Then let me suggest it," Barton resumed in a low

tone. "All your life you have been more or less of a king. As the Sunday papers say, you have 'wielded a tremendous influence for good.' That sort of twaddle, I take it, finally went to your head like a cheap wine and made you as nutty as you are. You really do think you are 'The Big I Am.' Whatever strikes you as 'for the good of humanity' is what the world shall have, whether it likes your brand of salvation or not. Now, just as a common mortal, I don't fancy being bossed about by a lunatic like you. If you care to put it up to the rest of this United States, to Europe and to the world at large, you will find close on two billion human beings who think about this just as I do. Suppose Quayle's invention finally goes to your head as being king of the money market did. You'd go crazy. Crazy? Why, man, you're that already. There's no word of any language to describe the sort of jack you'd make of yourself if you ever got your pet 'humanity' by the throat. I am going to keep the control of Quayle's invention entirely in my own hands which," he concluded with a sardonic smile, "are just as much more capable than yours as yours were than poor old Quayle's."

The banker trembled with repressed passion. Driven to the brink of madness he turned back for one white instant and faced his persecutor.

"Do with me what you like," he flung at the cold, hard face which watched him as pitilessly as a stone image, "but save France!"

Barton studied his victim dispassionately.

"I believe you mean exactly what you say," he an-

nounced after a moment's reflection. "Something apparently is worth more to you than the chance to be king of the world. Don't get puffed up about it. Whether you know it or not, the one thing you give a damn about is just your rotten conceit. To have people speak well of you after you are dead seems to you a thing worth while. Personally, I prefer this life itself to a lot of blabber about it after the lights are out on the stage. Take your choice; I'm not narrow-minded. I'll give you this much satisfaction. 'Saving France' fits into my plans exactly."

"And the invention?" Cutts demanded, tense with terror.

"I shan't need it—to save France. Poyère shall have something a little better than the French gold when your obligations fall due. I've got the All American half talked into it already. The Corporation is doing famously."

"The invention?" Cutts persisted. "What——?"

"You'll see later, if you live long enough. As you have said so often, you and I must co-operate to make Quayle's masterpiece a going, practical concern. In payment for all your generous help in financing it I shall let you co-operate with me after you come back from Pasadena. Get over your crazy temper. Before you know where you are that slack tongue of yours will have hanged you. I'm advising you for your own good. Now write me out that check—two years' advance salary."

Cutts breathed heavily. Although the veins on his

neck and forehead stood out with rage he managed to speak calmly.

"I refuse," he said, deliberately.

His defiance was the last rag of his manhood. Barton quickly tore it to shreds.

"Where's Hansen?" he demanded coldly.

"I don't know," Cutts muttered.

"Want me to find out for you, and pass the tip on to your daughter?"

The banker's trembling fingers fumbled for his check book.

"That's better," Barton encouraged as the shaking hand drew forth a fountain pen. "Was it you or that hound dog of a captain of yours who pitched Quayle overboard to the sharks?"

"I did not injure Quayle!" the banker groaned.

"No? Just to prove it you are about to write me that handsome check. There's something loose somewhere. Perhaps," he mused, "Miss Cutts knows what it is."

"You don't understand——"

"Then I'll find Hansen and ask him all about it. How's that? Hurry up with that check; I'm tired of arguing."

"Under protest," Cutts ground through his clenched teeth, "I submit to your blackmail to save my daughter's name. You know as well as I do that I am innocent of what you say. *I did not injure Quayle!*" He flung the check at his enemy and collaborator.

"Thanks," said Barton ironically. "Would you mind picking up that trifle and handing it to me?"

On the point of apoplexy Cutts delivered the check in the manner customary between gentlemen.

"Much obliged," said Barton, folding it away in his bill case. "Now, Mr. Cutts, let's get back to a business basis. This isn't Saturday night at an East-side movie. You can count on me to do my part. I want to make a fortune no less than you. Don't kid yourself. You don't give a damn about civilization. All you are interested in is saving your own bacon—including of course your well-merited reputation as a leader in social reforms. Personally I don't give a whoop about reforms of any kind. My game is bigger than yours. Stick by me and I'll stick by you—to the end of the world, if we go that far. Keep in touch with me from Pasadena. Poyère is swinging round to the idea of giving us an extension of eight or ten months on the date of our first payment to France. A little more persuasion of the right kind will tip him over to our side. As you are still nominally the President of the All American we shall need your authorization before closing with him when he finally does think he sees the light. So don't go more than a hundred miles from the telephone while you're out West. I may need your orders to get the fish tanks going out on Long Island or something of the sort —more money, for instance. This thing is going to cost like the devil, especially as it must be a rush job. But it's worth whatever it costs. What wouldn't Satan have given for a chance like this," he laughed,

"before they kicked him out of Heaven? You know your *Paradise Lost,* I guess? Well, au revoir, Mr. Cutts. Keep sweet and smiling. I must run along now to keep an important date."

"Where are you going?" Cutts demanded in a panic of suspicion.

"If you must know," Barton replied, "I'm having tea or something of the kind with a very charming grass widow. She's one of my latest. Too bad you're a family man. Well, I must be going."

"Go to hell!"

Cutts astonished himself by the involuntary, vehement vulgarity of his language. Two years earlier such a phrase would have been impossible from his tongue. He had never suspected the existence of such unseemly heat beneath his snowcapped morality.

Barton glanced back at his partner with a sarcastic grin.

"Anywhere you say, Mr. Cutts. But I shall be back again tomorrow morning at eight sharp to see whether you have left those orders I want for our joint aquarium. Don't forget the interviews. So long!"

For hours the harassed, defeated man sat moodily at his desk, brooding over the wreck of his grandiose dreams. He felt old and ill. The last of the office force looked in to bid him good night, and still he sat motionless, as lonely as the last man on a freezing planet. Why had he fallen? Looking back on his life since the Lucerne Conference he saw it all now as one long, hideous mistake.

"I must have been insane," he muttered, at last ris-

ing to go home. "What is to be done? Oh, my God, what is to be done? And Sheila's heart is broken too. What is to be done?"

Two days later he and Sheila, his dear girl, the one spot of light that still shone brightly before his fast clouding mind, were aboard the Overland Limited for Pasadena.

CHAPTER XI

DOUBTS

THE official reason given out by Cutts for his precipitate departure from New York was his daughter's health. His only object in going so suddenly to California, he declared to everyone who asked and to many who took no interest whatever in his movements, was to humor the sick daughter who craved his affection. She needed the winter sunshine, but if he were not there to share it she would starve in the midst of plenty. Thus it came about that father and daughter retired from the fret and cold of New York to take their lazy ease in a lazier climate.

They had now been living for two weeks in Cutts' villa. The banker's health had not improved. Sheila blamed the long distance telephone, and threatened to have the persistent pest taken out of the house. But in her heart she knew that fertilizer quotations, foreign exchange, and European bids for sulphuric acid were not the roots of her father's trouble. Young Barton, he admitted grudgingly in response to her pointed questions, was doing admirably with the All American, and the chemical products market was booming famously. Some secret worry, she guessed,

was gnawing at her father's vitals and wearing down his fast diminishing reserves of strength. If only he would confide in her, he might be cured. So she thought, little dreaming what monster it was that made her father's days a nightmare and his all but sleepless nights a hell of anxiety. Barton, the banker had now known for long, was a consistently heavy drinker and a phenomenally loose liver. What if the young chemist's iron will power at last gave way under the incessant dissipation? Both would be betrayed, and civilization as the banker conceived it would come to a sudden and disastrous end. Not only France would go down in ruin, but the United States, Asia —the whole world, and the name of Cutts would be execrated so long as there was a human tongue capable of cursing.

Had Quayle seen the banker in those black weeks he might easily have jumped to the conclusion that Cutts was merely paying the ransom extorted by his conscience. And he would have been wrong. The banker's conscience never mentioned murder. First and last Cutts' one interest in life apart from his daughter, whether he ever realized it or not, was the maintenance of his personal vanity unimpaired.

This balmy morning Sheila had gone out before breakfast to gather an armful of gladioli. Entering the breakfast room she found her father standing dejectedly before the open French windows, staring with unseeing eyes out over the rolling lawns. His face was gray and drawn with worry. Hearing her step he turned. His eyes rested idly on the flaming

armful of blood red flowers, and before he knew that he was speaking, his tongue had betrayed him by a curious slip. All night he had laid awake, tossing feverishly and brooding over what might have been had not Quayle "tempted" him by seeking aid to finance the fatal invention.

"Those are his favorite flowers," he said.

"Oh," Sheila gasped, as if she had been struck.

The scarlet spires slipped from her listless arm to the carpet, to lie there, tumbled together in strange disorder like a living accusation of murder.

Involuntarily the banker glanced down at the flowers, and then up in panic at the transparent pallor of his daughter's face.

"What did I say?" he stammered.

She all but choked over the words in her throat.

"Is he alive?"

"How could he be?" Her father's face was the color of dirty ashes.

"You said these *are* his favorite flowers."

"Did I? It was a foolish slip. I am sorry."

She looked at him wildly. Was he insane or was she? What was the mad suspicion that germinated in her mind and would not come to birth? To name it was impossible, for she had never been conscious of its conception. Yet unknown to herself every action, every slightest word of her father's for the past nine months, had analyzed and refitted itself into a monstrous new pattern far beneath the vigilant censorship of her waking mind. Little inconsistencies, trivial remarks that seemed to mean one thing while saying

another, all found their appointed places in that devilishly logical indictment of which she was unaware.

At this moment the inaudible, unsuspected accuser all but made itself heard. Her father coughed nervously. The last links in that subtle chain of associations were not forged. For that day at least the banker's wrists would not feel the cold cut of the shackles. His daughter interpreted his incoherent remark and his lame attempt at an explanation—for he had halted in his speech—as the aberrations of a disordered brain. Her father was ill indeed; she must inveigle him into consulting a specialist. He blundered on, hurting her horribly.

"Do you miss him much?" he asked, unable longer to repress the morbid question which had been torturing him for months.

Sheila had not expected this. All the old grief flooded over her anew. She flung up her arms as if to shield herself from a brutal blow.

"I miss him more," she burst out passionately, "than any mother ever missed her dead baby. Every hour of the day or night, whether I am conscious of the thought or not, I am thinking of him. He can never come back, and I can never forget him. Why must I live?"

"Sheila, Sheila, you must not give way like this. You——"

"Oh, how can I help it? What is the use of pretending? Why can't I die and forget that David ever lived? You have brought it all back again. I thought I was beginning to forget. Now I know that all these

months I have been lying, lying, lying. Which is better, to live and remember him, or to die and forget him forever?"

"Sheila, you are ill." He tried to conceal the double shock which her passionate outburst had given him. Did his daughter mean what her words implied? Was death the end of everything in her dark philosophy? Could this be the girl whose prayers he had heard when she first learned to lisp?

"Though I may seem heartless in saying it," he continued as kindly as he could, "believe me, Sheila, such sorrow as yours does not last, because it cannot. We human beings are not made that way. A great pain, but not an infinite grief, is all that our flesh can stand. Nature in the end numbs even the keenest agony of mind or of body. Your pain will be numbed, as will mine, which is only the after-pain of yours."

"It will not."

"Have you forgotten all that you ever believed? This is the crisis to test your faith. Submit yourself to what must be because it must, and look forward to what is to be. Fix your mind on the certain happiness of another life where you will see David again, and you will forget the transitory sorrows of this, where you can never meet."

"Oh, *that*," she said wearily.

With a gesture of utter helplessness she turned her back on him and stared hopelessly out over the lawns.

The painful scene was broken by the entry of the maid with the coffee.

"What shall I do with these flowers, Miss Sheila?" the girl asked.

"Throw them away."

By tacit agreement they sat down to the meal as if nothing had happened. The pretence at eating was long drawn out, for neither wished to betray the other into a show of emotion that could do no good. Sheila's unborn suspicion had not yet taken organized shape. Unless some sharper accident than the last betrayed the banker, his daughter might go to her grave without ever guessing the cause of her restless misery. Her normal mind having regained the complete control of her waking thoughts, she felt convinced that her father was on the verge of a bad nervous breakdown from which he might never fully recover. To prevent this horrible catastrophe was now her one concern. Though her own trouble would always be with her, she might avert his. All through that interminable breakfast she watched him surreptitiously. Little slips, slight, unaccountable deviations from lifelong habits that would have passed unnoticed by his closest friends, found their instant meanings in her watchful eyes. Before they left the table she had decided that he should consult a specialist in nervous disorders that very day.

But how was she to cajole him? He would agree at once, she knew, to humor her fancy. Then one of two things must happen; either the knowledge that his daughter suspected his sanity would finally overthrow it, or he would see himself as he was and become incurable. Whatever she did must be done by

stealth. He should be treated without his knowledge. With this problem in her mind she rose at last, saying she was going out for a walk. She had made her plan.

"There will be some people here for dinner tonight," she announced. "The Jarvises and the Trumplers are coming over for the evening. Mr. Jarvis will probably bring his cousin from the East, who is staying with them for a few weeks. So you will be home on time, if you go out, won't you?"

Relieved by this return to the commonplace, Cutts promised not to forget the engagement.

The Jarvises, a quiet, middle aged couple, sharing their bungalow with Mrs. Jarvis' aged mother, were Sheila's most intimate friends. He was a retired lawyer who had inherited a modest fortune and who now divided his leisure between golf, first editions of the legal classics, and roses. Both Jarvis and his comfortable wife had taken a great fancy to Sheila at their first meeting on the links. They were just the right pair to calm the distracted girl's jangled nerves.

Leaving her father in the library to his morning session with the long distance telephone, she went up to her room to dress for the street. The proposed dinner party had been improvised on the spur of the moment. There would be three guests, the Jarvises and one other. The Trumplers would not come, for they would not be invited. Just before the dinner hour she would casually present their regrets to her father.

When Sheila reached their door the Jarvises were

just setting out for a morning's golf. Two sentences from her instantly changed their plans.

"Come in," Jarvis suggested, "and let us talk things over. So your father is getting no better? Well, we shall see what can be done."

Sheila concealed nothing of her anxiety.

"I see," said Jarvis. "Now what do you want me to do?"

"First, who is the best brain specialist within reach?"

"Burdette, in Los Angeles. The other alienists always call him in when there's a really hard nut to crack in the courts."

"Then let us go to him at once. He must come to dinner tonight. You can introduce him as your cousin from the East. For safety we had better ask him to be 'Mr. Wilberforce,' in case my father has ever seen Dr. Burdette's name in the papers."

When they reached the doctor's office, Sheila went in alone to see him. It was not his regular office hour, but his time for private study. Nevertheless he admitted her.

Dr. Burdette was a man who asked few questions. But each was a probe. At the conclusion of the short interview he consented to Sheila's plan. He and Jarvis were about the same age, so the alienist could easily pass as the lawyer's cousin. The consultation lasted only a bare five minutes.

Sheila's hand was on the doorknob when Burdette, as if by an afterthought, quietly asked a startling question.

"What crime, Miss Cutts, has your father on his conscience?"

She could not believe her ears.

"Did you ask me a question?"

"What crime has your father on his conscience? You had better sit down."

The doctor rose hastily and assisted her to a chair.

"Now think clearly," he continued. "Take your own time. I am not busy this morning."

"I don't know what you mean," she faltered.

"No? Are you sure?"

"Yes," she responded in a low voice.

"That 'Yes' was a 'No.' Come now, Miss Cutts, what crime has your father on his conscience? You can tell me without fear of the consequences. I am your physician. Whatever you say will go no farther than me. Even if your father had committed a murder I should never betray him. You understand that, don't you? I am asking merely for professional information. Before I can help your father I must know everything. Everything, mind, without the slightest reservation. Take your time."

"Believe me, Doctor, I know of nothing. My father is incapable of what you suggest."

"Yes? Then why do you suspect him?"

"I suspect my father? Why should I?"

"That is what I am asking you."

"You think I am concealing something?"

"I know you are."

For a moment a stifled voice in her mind strove to

cry out. Then it subsided, choked down by the alert censor. Burdette's eyes never left her face.

"I know of nothing," she insisted defiantly.

"Very well," he said. "I believe you."

"Then why did you insinuate that I do know something when I do not?"

"Never mind now. You will understand some day. I was mistaken. Let it go at that."

"But I don't like to take that for an answer. It is unfair of you not to tell me."

"If you put it that way perhaps I had better be plain with you. You yourself don't know that you know. You are honest when you deny concealment. Now if you were to submit to hypnosis, I might learn a great deal that would surprise both of us. But I do not urge or even suggest that you do so. It would be somewhat irregular and it might be disastrous to your health. I am simply answering your question."

"Am I ill too?" she whispered.

"No, no," he laughed. "At least not that way. And as for the rest you look healthy enough, although perhaps a little worried. Anxiety over your father's trouble is all that ails you. I am right, am I not?" he concluded, shooting her a keen glance.

Do what she would to control herself she began to sob convulsively. The man's merciless persistence was wearing her down. In ten minutes she had told him all that she knew of Quayle's life, the great inventor he had been, of his ambitions to devote his life to pure research and invention, of his love for her that was equalled only by her own for him, of

his trip around the world with her father, and of the forget-me-nots she had planted on his lonely grave in Singapore. The doctor listened to it all without moving a muscle.

"Now," he began gently when she had finished her confession, "I will ask you just one more question. Did your father dislike David?"

"No," she replied readily, and lapsed into nervous silence. The suggested doubt had taken root. "I don't know," she admitted.

"Thank you, that is all. I shall be at your house promptly at seven-thirty this evening. Wilberforce was the name I am to go by, you said?"

"Yes. You are to pass as Mr. Jarvis' cousin, an architect from Detroit."

"That would do, possibly, but as an architect I should not have much in common with your father. Besides, I know nothing of architecture." A strange looked flickered for a moment in the doctor's eyes. "To give a line of approach, suppose you introduce me as Mr. Wilberforce of Detroit, a manufacturer of chemicals. Your father I believe is now President of the All American Combine. Either you or Mr. Jarvis can mention my assumed business casually in the course of dinner. Then I can easily gain a footing in the intimacy of the family. I shall have interests akin to those of the prospective son-in-law whom your father has lost. I remember enough of my medical school chemistry to play the part successfully to the average business man. Don't forget to tell your friends of the change."

Sheila agreed. She started to make some comment, and hesitated.

"Yes?" he invited encouragingly.

The bars of her reserve having been broken down, she now had to bite her lips to avoid talking. But she could not help herself.

"Perhaps there is something after all that is troubling my father. He never tells me anything of his business affairs. I know that he has had financial worries for some months past. He has always been straight. All his associates swear by him. But perhaps in his distracted state he has——" She did not complete the suggestion, for the simple reason that she could not. The censor was still in control. He had permitted his antagonist to say a few words just to prove how foolish he really was.

"Yes?" the doctor suggested.

"Well, nothing after all. I have been upset and didn't know what I was saying. Oh, I hate myself! My father never could or would do a mean or dishonest thing."

"His financial honesty is a household word," the doctor agreed heartily, carefully omitting to specify the type of household in which the probity of Cutts was esteemed. "I am sure you would have wronged your father had you suspected anything to the contrary. Good morning, Miss Cutts, and get out into the fresh air."

When he was alone, Burdette returned to his desk and sat idly playing with a paper knife.

"I wonder what that man has done," he speculated,

as he rose at last to prepare for his daily visit to the hospital. "They always give themselves away sooner or later. How long will Cutts hold out? Shall I get to the bottom of him tonight, or is this to be another long job like the Dartnall case?"

CHAPTER XII

SEALED

BURDETTE did not completely solve his problem that night. But he learned enough to make him determined to get to the bottom of the banker's trouble. The closer he observed Cutts the more puzzled he became. Was this case after all within the province of his profession? Or was it one that justly should be handed over to the police? That the banker was suffering under a severe mental strain was obvious. It needed no alienist to see that much at a glance. But was the man's mind deranged by his worries? It was not easy to say, and the ethics of the doctor's profession demanded that he eliminate all reasonable chances of error from his final decision.

Cutts had received his guests cordially enough, but with a certain air of abstraction. Throughout the long dinner he seemed to have difficulty in keeping his mind on the conversation. His remarks were always to the point, but a trifle delayed. While the black coffee was being served, Burdette caught his host in the act of surreptitiously consulting his watch. When the banker glanced up and caught his eye the doctor did not veil his knowledge as courtesy demanded. By

looking pointedly at the pocket into which the watch had disappeared, he forced Cutts to excuse himself.

"I must apologize," the banker began rather lamely, "for not being more lively this evening. The fact is I am expecting an important long distance call from New York at any minute."

"Perhaps we had better be going," Jarvis remarked pleasantly to his wife.

"Not at all," Cutts replied hastily. "Sheila sees so few friends here. Please take pity on her and stay."

Sheila added her protestations, and the Jarvises took the hint. As they rose to go into the drawing-room, the faint tinkle of a telephone bell from the library brought them all to an involuntary halt.

"That's it," Cutts exclaimed.

With a hurried excuse he dashed toward the library door. After the banker had closed the door behind him they distinctly heard the key turn in the lock. Sheila looked pained. Chatting easily, her guests followed her from the room, affecting not to have noticed the gross insult.

"Well?" Sheila inquired of Burdette.

"Your father is under a great strain," the doctor replied cautiously.

"Is that all?"

"Possibly. I am not yet sure that he needs my professional attention. How late may I stay tonight?"

"If we play bridge you might stay till after twelve."

"That won't do. I must make him talk."

"We can say you don't play. The Jarvises and I can get along at whist with a dummy. Then my father

will have to entertain you. Have you been following the fall of the German and French money in the newspapers?"

"In a general way, but not enough to discuss it intelligently."

"Start him on that. He will do the talking."

When Cutts joined them fifteen minutes later he found Sheila and the Jarvises playing whist. "Wilberforce" was glancing through a portfolio of etchings. The players merely looked up without speaking, being apparently absorbed in their game. Burdette had carefully selected an etching of Reims Cathedral as it appeared before the war.

"I wonder if it will ever look like that again?" he remarked casually, showing Cutts the picture. His eyes studiously avoided the banker's face. To all appearances he was interested only in the future of the ruin.

"They have begun restoring it, I believe," Cutts replied, drawing up a chair. "But whether they will have money enough to finish within a reasonable time is another question. France is in bad shape."

"So it seems from the way the franc keeps on falling. I shouldn't be surprised to see it follow the mark."

"It won't go that far," the banker asserted confidently. "Before long you will see American capital holding the franc steady. I know," he declared jubilantly. "In fact my long distance message was to that effect. I shall sleep easier for the next sixteen months," he concluded with a laugh.

To the doctor's practised eye Cutts appeared to have made a sudden and remarkable recovery from a profound nervous depression. The distracted man of the dinner table had blossomed out into a genial, self-satisfied after-dinner entertainer. Whatever that long distance call may have told the banker it had acted as beneficent tonic. Cutts was a new man. Putting aside for the moment the lighter task of ascertaining the exact cause of the banker's sudden recovery, Burdette addressed himself to the more difficult problem of making Cutts talk of Quayle, skilfully turning the conversation in the direction he wished it to take.

"What about the mark?" he asked. "Will German money ever come back?"

Cutts judiciously assumed the rôle of the discriminating financial expert.

"That is difficult to say. Are you involved?"

"Indirectly, yes. As a manufacturer of dyes I must watch out for Central Europe. If Germany ever gets back on a sound financial basis it will affect every chemical industry in the United States. Germany still leads the world in chemistry."

"Not since the B. F. T. disaster," the banker demurred.

"Of course not—at present," Burdette agreed. "What I meant was that Germany still has the greatest corps of highly trained chemical technicians in the world."

"Again I do not entirely agree," Cutts objected, pursing his lips as if he, being the straw President of the huge All American, were thereby omniscient on

matters chemical. He was beginning to enjoy himself as he had not done since the old days before B. F. T. blew the stuffing out of his banking Corporation. "By the way, Mr. Wilberforce," he demanded suddenly, "is your company one of the recalcitrants?"

Burdette got a nasty shock. He was fast wading into deeper water than he had anticipated. His intention had been to swing the talk round to Quayle, and now he found this alert magnate cross questioning him on his fictitious business.

"Recalcitrants?" he parried to gain time.

Cutts laughed good-naturedly.

"Our name for the wilful minority of chemical manufacturers who still refuse to come under the protection of the All American. Why don't you join us? We shan't eat you," he concluded archly.

The doctor plunged desperately.

"As a matter of fact," he confessed frankly, "I asked my cousin to get me this introduction with just what you suggest in view. I hope you won't think I have trespassed too far on your hospitality."

"Not at all," the banker assured him genially. "Why not come into the library and talk things over? My daughter doesn't like cigar smoke in this room."

Burdette gladly accepted the invitation, confident that he could keep his head above water and force Cutts under. The incautious invitation to adjourn to the library gave Burdette his first clue to the strange psychology of his patient. Would a man entirely in possession of his senses have invited a mere acquaintance into the library after he had locked the door of that

very room on entering it to receive a telephone report on the state of the French money market, as Cutts professed to have done? The telephone presumably was still connected. How could the banker know that it would not jangle while he and "Wilberforce" were together in the library? This oversight on Cutts' part intimated to Burdette either that the banker's secret negotiations were all safely concluded or that his mind had lost its cunning.

As they passed into the library Burdette framed his intended "third degree" in a flash. He would force Cutts to talk both of his daughter and of Quayle. Then, if the banker were as slipshod in his thinking as his actions seemed to indicate, Burdette could easily turn whatever slight, unconscious betrayals offered themselves to instant advantage.

"So you felt a little shy of us, eh?" Cutts laughed as he passed his guest the cigars.

"That is hardly a fair statement of my feeling," Burdette objected as he lit his cigar. "You must remember that I have been in the chemical business for years. As an old hand at the game I perhaps have some slants on it that a great organizer like yourself might miss."

"For example?" Cutts encouraged, carefully selecting a cigar.

"Take the technical end. Suppose one of my chemists develops a process for lowering the cost of 'basic black' a few cents a pound. My firm patents the invention. The law gives us complete protection, domestic and foreign, until we have milked the process

dry. The All American either has to buy us out at our own figure or give up attempting to compete with us. Over night we can put a big dent in your profits. Now, that is what we 'recalcitrants' are banking on. Germany has the greatest number of highly trained research chemists, but man for man our best can equal theirs. Take that young chap Quayle, for instance. If he hadn't died out in Singapore we might have beaten the world in five years. That boy was a chemist—the real thing."

The match in Cutts' fingers shook, but he lit his cigar. With rare presence of mind he contented himself with a nod.

"Quayle, I venture to say," Burdette persisted, "could have put America ahead of Germany almost single-handed." The trembling of the match had not escaped the doctor's notice. "It's a pity he died so young. We all looked for him to do great things."

"In what particular line, Mr. Wilberforce? I never talked much with him about his work."

Burdette was neatly caught. But did the banker know it? Until that morning when Sheila told him of her lover and his brilliant future cut short by an untimely death, the doctor had never heard of David Quayle. Did Cutts suspect him of playing a part? Or was he merely seeking an estimate of the dead man's ability from a fellow chemist? If the banker did suspect he certainly was a cool hand at hiding his emotions. Having blundered in his intention the doctor ignored Cutts' direct, disconcerting question, and shoved the probe home. For all he knew Quayle's

specialty might have been artificial baby foods. To reply sensibly to the banker's challenge was out of the question.

"Oh," he laughed, "we needn't go into technicalities. I just chose Quayle as an illustration of my point because I thought you would know all about him. Jarvis told me—he may have been misinformed—that Quayle was engaged to your daughter."

Burdette had surprised the effect he was seeking to produce. A look, half fear, half stealthy craftiness, flickered over the banker's face. Almost instantly it resumed its bland mask. Only an expert in reading human emotions would have detected that momentary lapse. To the alienist, remembering Sheila's confession of the morning, that swift betrayal was as damning evidence of secret crime as a formal conviction before a jury. Burdette felt convinced that this suave man was concealing some vital act in his past of which he was either ashamed or terrified. But he could not yet decide whether the banker was a responsible agent or insane when he committed his crime, whatever may have been its nature. This man would have to be closely watched, perhaps for months, before the true state of his mind could be determined.

"I was not aware," Cutts responded somewhat coldly, "that the Jarvises knew of my daughter's engagement to young Quayle. She must have told them recently. Well," he continued briskly, "shall we have a look at your company? What's your annual output?"

The doctor however was not to be diverted from

his advantage. Throwing courtesy to the dogs he pressed his point beyond the limits of common decency, with the deliberate intention of bringing matters to a head then and there.

"Was Jarvis right," he asked slowly, "in saying that you and Quayle didn't get along any too well?"

This prying, personal question from an acquaintance of less than three hours' standing hit the mark. At the unwarranted, boorish insult Cutts went white with fury. As his anger leapt up his caution departed.

"What business is it of yours?" he snapped.

"Wilberforce" quietly drew a card from his case and laid it on the banker's knee.

"My introduction," he said. "I humbly beg your pardon for having approached you by subterfuge. It was your daughter's suggestion."

Cutts picked up the card with a hand that shook like a drunkard's and stared at the name.

"Burdette?" he repeated. "Who are you?"

"Haven't you heard of me in connection with the Dartnall case?" Burdette hinted suggestively.

Cutts shook his head, but made no verbal denial. Either he was too stunned to answer or he still retained sufficient command of himself to hold his incriminating tongue.

"Well," said Burdette, "it doesn't greatly matter whether you have or not. We can come back to that later. For the present however you had better know my standing, as it directly concerns your case. Hungerford, the railroad king, was a friend of yours, was he not?"

Cutts nodded.

"Then," Burdette continued, "you will remember that I was the defense alienist in the trial of his degenerate son. I see that you recall the circumstances. It was as tragic a case as any in the history of crime in this country. The young man undoubtedly was insane, yet I could not save him. Why? Because from the first he deceived me completely. That boy had a genius for deception. It was part of his disease. But had he made a clean breast of everything from the beginning I could have gone before the jury and had him sent to an institution immediately. No court in the United States would have sentenced a maniac like him to the gallows. He hanged himself by lying so skilfully that even I, used to the perversions of the insane, believed what he said. Not till eighteen months after he had paid the full penalty for his folly did I succeed in unravelling his knotted lies. Why did he lie when the truth would have given him at least life with a possible chance of recovery? He lied because he could not help himself. He lied because it was his nature to lie.

"The Dartnall case was similar. That time, however, I was on the other side. Dartnall's crime was so mean that I swore to convict him if it took ten years. From the first he protested his innocence. I kept at him. He had everything on his side—money, political pull, and a good share of stupid public opinion. The first jury disagreed. One man only stood out for conviction. The other eleven voted for acquittal on the first ballot. The press, the lawyers,

everybody said there had been a miscarriage of justice. Dartnall, in the eyes of the public was innocent, a grievously wronged man. His defense, you remember, was not insanity. His lawyers aimed to prove that he had not committed the crime, and they all but succeeded. I was merely an unofficial guest of the prosecution, a spectator on the sidelines, invited to keep an eye on the defendant and to offer private suggestions for wearing down his defense.

"Almost at the outset of the trial I became convinced that Dartnall was another of these natural liars. To me his case was not proper material for a court of justice but data for a dispassionate, scientific investigation in abnormal psychology. Dartnall should have sat before a clinic, not before a jury.

"What betrayed him? Not the big things that your low-grade criminal usually blunders over. Dartnall's guard on slips the average good jury would notice was perfect. Little things—the way he avoided my eyes in court, the suspicious readiness with which he answered all of my questions when I interviewed him with the District Attorney and his slight, erratic variations from day to day in performing the most trivial acts, any one of which should have been perfectly automatic and a firmly fixed habit, said as plainly as print that the man was acting a part.

"The second trial, you recall, ended in three for conviction, nine for acquittal. We were half way through the third when, one hot Sunday afternoon, the District Attorney and I obtained a full, voluntary confession. Dartnall had hung out for eighteen

months. Long before he confessed I foresaw his break, and I knew that it was only a matter of persistence to make him talk. Sooner or later they all talk. They cannot help themselves. You had better begin."

"Begin on what? I have not the faintest conception of what you are driving at."

"No? Then why have you listened so patiently to all I have said?"

"You are my guest," Cutts replied feebly. "I could not very well silence you. Believe me, Dr. Burdette, you are making a serious mistake. Someone, I fear, has played a poor practical joke on you."

"If so," Burdette responded slowly, "the culprit is your own daughter."

"My daughter?" Cutts echoed blankly.

"That rather disconcerts you, doesn't it? I'm not surprised, after what Miss Cutts told me."

An innocent man would not have hesitated so long as did the banker before attempting to parry this thrust. Burdette's suspicions became certainties, although as yet he was unable to guess precisely what lay between Cutts and his daughter, or whether the cause of their secret antagonism also was at the roots of the banker's irregularity—or crime—which he was striving to conceal.

"What did she tell you?" he faltered.

"That you are ill, and in need of treatment if you are not to suffer a complete nervous breakdown."

Cutts looked relieved.

"Poor Sheila," he confessed freely, as a father

might to his family physician, "is not herself. She exaggerates my worries—now happily past."

"Thanks to that telephone call you received after dinner?" Burdette suggested.

"Partly. I may tell you—in confidence, of course, as the Corporation would not wish it known—that the French government has agreed to give us an extension of time on a very important contract that was crowding us to the limit."

"And you thought it necessary to lock the door while you took the message?"

"I was afraid one of the servants might come in while I was talking. In these big business affairs you cannot be too careful. There are spies everywhere."

"Indeed? You have been losing weight, have you not?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"And you don't sleep well?"

"Really, Dr. Burdette, you must excuse me. I am not your patient."

"Pardon my bluntness, but you are. Your daughter called me in this evening expressly to treat you and to find out, if possible, the exact cause of your extraordinary behaviour to her since—well, since a certain event of which I need not remind you. The Jarvises were a blind."

"To what event do you refer? I must say I can't follow two words of what you are saying."

"Shall I refresh your memory? Your daughter was engaged to David Quayle—you admitted that a while

ago. How do you account for your daughter's lack of confidence in you since Quayle's death?"

"What did my daughter tell you?"

"She admitted a great deal."

"If she has lost confidence in me this is the first I have heard of it. I suppose you are alluding to what happened this morning?"

Burdette was not thinking of the scene at breakfast, because Sheila's feeling for good taste had carefully censored that painful episode from her talk with the doctor.

"Partly," he said.

"Then I think you overestimate its significance. I may tell you as a professional man that the mere mention of David Quayle's name still has a most depressing effect on my daughter, even after all these months. Usually I am extremely careful what I say before Sheila. But this morning I inadvertently made some commonplace reference to David and she broke down completely. This, I take it, is what you mean. For my own part I give it no great weight. Time is God's blessed remedy for her trouble."

"Would you mind, Mr. Cutts, giving me your version of what happened this morning?"

"Not at all," Cutts agreed readily.

Secretly elated that the doctor's suspicions, if indeed he had any, were being diverted from himself, the banker gave a minute and truthful account of the scene with Sheila before breakfast. Burdette followed with the closest attention. He had not been deceived

in his diagnosis of Sheila's trouble. Without knowing it herself she suspected her father of disloyalty or worse to her dead lover. Burdette began to feel confident that he could wrest the truth from the banker before leaving the house that night.

"As you remarked a while ago," he said when Cutts triumphantly finished his recital, "your daughter evidently is not herself. I judged as much from what she told me. Now, there is only one way of clearing up such a situation. This fear, or whatever you may wish to call it, which your daughter harbors for the thought of her dead lover, and which expresses itself in hysteria when his name is mentioned, must be eradicated without delay by full exposure. She must see once for all what is darkening her mind. Then it will cease to exist. Let us call her in and put the matter plainly before her."

Cutts went livid.

"I couldn't," he almost choked. "You don't understand——"

"I assure you that I do, fully. It is part of my profession to understand exactly just such cases as this. However, if this necessary step is distasteful to you, I shall be glad to do what I can alone. Have I your permission?"

Cutts grasped at this straw.

"Would you mind?"

"Not at all."

The doctor rose immediately to go in search of Sheila. He had confirmed his hypothesis and in addi-

tion had gained an overwhelming advantage which put the banker completely at his mercy. Burdette found Sheila alone. The Jarvises, seeing that her nerves were on edge, had left her soon after Cutts and the doctor retired to the library. Burdette wasted no words.

"I understood you to say this morning that you and Quayle were engaged?"

"Yes," she replied instantly, without a trace of emotion.

"You would have married him?"

"Whenever he wished it."

"So you really did love him?"

"I told you all that this morning."

"You did, and as I recall our interview, you were quite wrought up. You seem cool enough now."

"I was disturbed about father."

"So I remember. I have not disturbed you by asking?"

"Of course not. Why should I be disturbed?"

"You shouldn't. It would be most unnatural and morbid if you were, after all these months. Death is the most natural thing in the world. A year softens the cruellest blow, if not into a sweet pain, then into a fading grief that flesh and blood can support."

"I suppose I may not ask why you——?"

"Certainly you may. Your father and I were discussing your health. He was of the opinion that you were still brooding over David—unnaturally, I mean. A lingering memory is a different thing from the un-

healthy grief with which your father credits you. I assured him he was mistaken, and he begged me to verify my opinion."

"I am all right," she said firmly. "How is my father? Do you think——?"

"There is no immediate cause for anxiety. See that he rests. That will be sufficient for the present. Hadn't you better go to bed yourself? We may be talking several hours yet. By the way, I thought it best to tell him almost at once who I am."

She consulted her wristwatch.

"It is only a little past ten. But if you want me out of the way I shall go up to my own room. Tell my father the Jarvises had to leave early."

"I'll explain. Good night, Miss Cutts. Sleep well."

Burdette hurried back to the library. Sheila's calm when he spoke of Quayle, contrasted with Cutts' account of the scene at breakfast, had proved the doctor's hypothesis. This girl harbored a violent antipathy toward her father. That she was unconscious of her bitter antagonism made it none the less real.

Re-entering the library, Burdette decided to have it out with the banker. Before he left the house he would hear that gray-faced man's confession.

"Mr. Cutts," he began, "I have been right in my deductions from the beginning. Now, I am going to make it as easy as I can for you. Surely you have guessed why I went into such elaborate detail on the Hungerford and Dartnall cases? I give you credit for being more intelligent than poor young Hungerford,

and more sensible than Dartnall. Like Dartnall you might well hang out for eighteen months—or more. But I think not. You sleep badly, you have been losing weight, and already you are becoming apprehensive of imaginary dangers. Dartnall, like all of them, finally confessed. They all do. And so will you. It will relieve your mind and give me a reasonable chance of restoring your health. You had better begin. Confess."

Cutts stared at him in a white terror. What had Sheila said—what could she have said—to damn him? Had Barton betrayed him? No; that surely was impossible. For if Barton, thinking by getting Cutts out of the way to use the invention solely for his own advantage, had thrown hints in Sheila's way, he must have realized that the banker could ruin him with a word by telling Poyère the true significance of the "Cutts Aquarium" on Long Island.

"Confess?" he stammered. "Are you insane?"

"No. But I'm not yet sure about you. Come on. What have you on your mind?"

"This is an outrage! I refuse——"

"You had better not do that now. The time for that sort of thing went by shortly after I first told you my true name. An innocent man would have ordered the servants to throw me out. If you refuse to confide in me I automatically cease to be your medical adviser. Then I shall turn you over to the police. Would you wish your daughter to be dragged through the mud of the criminal courts to testify for you—if she can? If you do the sensible thing for

a man in your desperate position you will tell me everything. Whatever you confide to me in my professional capacity as your physician I must keep to myself. It shall go no farther."

"I have nothing to confide."

"Are you sure? Then your daughter is untruthful?"

"What did my daughter tell you?"

"Never mind. You are going to tell me as a beginning why you hated Quayle."

"I did not hate Quayle."

The hounded man had not sufficient presence of mind to refuse point blank to answer a leading question. Burdette followed up his advantage instantly.

"Then you disliked him?"

"Why should I answer your questions?"

The proper retort had come too late to be of any value as a defense. Checkmate was in sight.

"Because you can't afford to have me call the police. Think of what it would mean to your daughter. Why did you dislike Quayle? Let us take that as a starting point and go clear to the roots of your trouble. Don't hurry. I have lots of time. Say nothing until you are ready, but when you do start, make a clean breast of everything. It's the only way. Sooner or later you must."

With ostentatious indifference Burdette lit a cigar. He gave the impression that he would sit there, facing the huddled thing in the chair opposite him, a week if necessary. At last it spoke. And it asked a terrible question.

"Am I insane?"

"I don't know yet. What did you do to Quayle?"

The harried man looked up at his tormentor like a trapped rat at the dog which is waiting to break its back. Exactly what did this merciless fiend know? Who had told him? Sheila? His own dear girl, whom he had loved better than himself, better than anything on earth? Had he unconsciously betrayed himself to her? His fatal slip of that morning, and the heartbreaking scene which he had precipitated, stood out on the background of his terror like the shadow of a gallows on a white wall. Quayle had insisted that he must betray himself. What other disconnected words had he dropped for Sheila to pick up and piece together into a damning self-accusation of guilt? In his unreasoning panic he saw Sheila dying in disgrace before she was twenty-five, the daughter of a broken gambler who had been hanged for murder. She could never survive his hanging. With a sickening shock he suddenly remembered that in New York State capital punishment was inflicted not from the gallows, but from that infinitely more fitting monument to civilized compassion and justice, the electric chair. He would be haled back to New York for trial and execution. Sheila would go mad. By bringing this cold-blooded devil into the house she had shattered her own life no less than his. The scene at breakfast had finally convicted him in her eyes, and she had rushed off in anger to have her revenge for David. He must take this silent fiend at his word and trust him. Under the seal of professional secrecy

Burdette could not betray him. It was his one chance. If he refused to confess this devil would call the police.

"I am waiting," Burdette reminded him calmly. "But take your time. You will find the truth easiest."

"Is the forging of a death certificate a serious crime?" Cutts croaked.

"It depends largely upon circumstances. Quayle is not dead?"

"No."

"You understand exactly what you are saying?"

"Yes. I can stand it no longer. For months I have suffered with Sheila—oh, how I have suffered! To see her breaking her heart day after day for my senseless folly is more than I can bear. Why did I do it? Why?"

"What did you do?"

"It was not my fault. Quayle brought it on himself."

"No doubt," the doctor agreed coldly. "The victim usually does. At least that is a common alibi of the guilty party. But what exactly did you do to Quayle? Better get it over."

"Must I tell?" the stricken wretch whispered.

"You must. I'll lock the door in case one of the servants comes in to turn off the lights. Now," he continued, resuming his seat, "I wish all the details. The main outlines of your crime are obvious enough. Whatever you say is in the strictest confidence."

"You will not betray me?"

"I cannot. Whatever you tell me is between doctor

and patient. It would not be admitted as evidence in any court of law in this country."

"I am doing this for Sheila's sake. She must not suffer another day, or she will lose her mind. And she is so young, with all her life before her. You will help me? Promise! I cannot face her with the truth."

"I'll promise to do everything in my power to set right whatever it is possible to rectify, provided you tell me everything without reservation."

"Then I put myself in your hands." He swallowed several times before beginning the monotonous monologue which was to pass for his confession and the bill of clearance for his soul. "David was almost my own son. When his father died I practically adopted him, although not legally, because the boy resented my wealth. Seeing as much as they naturally did of one another it was inevitable that Sheila and he should fall in love in a boy and girl fashion. I did everything I could to encourage David, for he was a clean boy, until the awful day I found out my terrible mistake. David, I learned with a shock that I shall never forget, although outwardly everything that I could have asked of my own son, had the mind of a devil. He approached me and without shame asked me to finance the most hellish invention that a fiend ever imagined.

"His actions were a revelation of his true character. My protests that any human being could be so callous as to imperil the whole future and happiness of the race, passed clean over his head. He simply did not comprehend them. I pointed out that his invention,

if made public, would destroy civilization almost over night. From its nature it was so dangerous that it should never be made public in any form. Still he did not offer to destroy it. For his own selfish gain he would inflict on humanity the very scourge of God. I verily believe he was and is a moral imbecile.

"What could I do? In desperation I paid him an exorbitant sum for all his blueprints and calculations. The price he extorted was as much as he could have obtained elsewhere, from any unscrupulous corporation or from any dastardly government, and it was blackmail of the basest kind. Before his eyes I burned every scrap of his hellish work."

"If Quayle is still living," Burdette interposed, "what security have you that he will not reproduce his invention and blackmail either you again or someone else into suppressing it?"

Cutts moistened his lips and swallowed hard.

"I am coming to that," he said. "I took means to prevent him ever from doing the like again. And here," he declared boldly, "I must confess to breaking the law. I made Quayle sign a false confession that he had obtained large sums of money from me by forgery. I forced him to state that the very check by which I paid the blackmail he levied against civilization was a forgery. Call me as black as Quayle if you like, but I did it solely for the safety of civilization!"

"I am calling you nothing, yet," Burdette retorted quietly. "It will be time enough to evaluate the evidence when we have it all before us. Go on. Where does your daughter come in?"

"I admit," the banker confessed, "that I acted shamefully and, I see now, cruelly, toward Sheila. With Quayle's confession in my safe I had him in my power. I told him he was no fit husband for Sheila—he was not!—with his lack of moral sense, and I threatened to deliver him to justice unless he eliminated himself from her life. Sheila would never believe him guilty, he declared. I replied that whether she did or not I should exercise my power to put him behind the bars for forgery unless he consented to pass forever from her life. She might still love a felon, but the knowledge of his disgrace would break her heart. In kindness to her he must do as I dictated if he loved her. I will give Quayle this credit: he proved his love for my daughter when I finally convinced him that I would carry out my threat to its last letter."

"You certainly had a compelling argument," Burdette commented drily. "How did he efface himself?"

"You have promised not to betray me," Cutts reminded his confessor. "What we now did, he and I together, I know was a breach of the law. It is less serious, however, I imagine, than it otherwise might be, for it was done with his connivance, and he, if anyone, would normally be the technically injured party. He consented to a false death certificate. I need not go into details. Quayle 'died,' as you know, of the bubonic plague while ashore in Singapore. If you care to verify my statement I shall put you in touch with the drunken doctor who forged the death certificate, provided he is still living."

"I don't think that will be necessary," Burdette re-

torted with a biting irony which the banker missed. "Where is Quayle now?"

"Really I cannot say," Cutts acknowledged frankly. "I left him in Melbourne. He was going to begin life all over again in Australia."

"What do you wish me to do about your daughter?"

"I cannot say exactly. Can you think of some way of letting her know that David is still alive without humiliating me more than I have deserved? Sheila must not despise me!"

"You would be willing for her to marry Quayle now?"

"Yes! Her happiness is all I live for."

"I believe you," Burdette replied simply. "What a mess you've made of things. However, I am not here to lecture you, but to pull you out of the mud. You are quite sure, are you, that the invention will not stand between you and your daughter's happiness?"

"Quayle will never use it if she asks him to desist."

"Too bad you didn't think of that before you started buying forged death certificates. The thing's done. That is the fact. What next?"

"Will you help me to right the wrong I have done Sheila? To save her sanity she must have an object in life. If she were to look for him the occupation would keep her sane and hopeful."

"Provided he isn't dead by now. A second shock might well make her a hopeless case."

"You will help?"

"Yes. On one condition."

"Anything!"

"I take you at your word. I will make it as easy for you with your daughter as is humanly possible, provided only you tell me the truth of what you did to Quayle."

"But I have told you!"

"Hand me the telephone."

"What for? What——"

"Never mind. There is a limit to my patience. What Dartnall could not exhaust in eighteen months you have dissipated in less than an hour. You have forfeited your right to my professional consideration. I have no recourse but to hand you over to the police."

"You must believe——"

"Stop lying! I could tear your ridiculous story to shreds in half a minute. It is riddled with inconsistencies. Only a fool would hope to deceive an alienist with such a tissue of amateurish rubbish as you have tried to palm off on me. Now, once more: will you tell me what you did to Quayle or shall I call the police?"

Cutts broke down completely.

"I did not kill Quayle," he moaned.

Burdette, in spite of himself, started. He had not suspected an actual murder among the banker's misdeeds, and Cutts' unsought denial of homicide came as a confession of guilt in the first degree.

"No?" he said. "Then what did you do with him? I did not suppose you shot him, or threw him to the sharks out there at Singapore."

"I will not tell you!"

It was the last, futile flash of defiance. Cutts was

already broken. Burdette pointed silently to the telephone and the banker groaned. For an hour and a half in a husky whisper he detailed how he had cast Quayle away on the most desolate spot of all the Westralian beaches to die of thirst. Burdette gave no sign that he was listening to more than a commonplace recital of the trivial events in an ordinary business man's holiday. This at last was the cold, professional truth he had been seeking. Cutts' alleged reason for marooning Quayle was that he, the humanitarian, wished only to preserve civilization from ruin.

"What was this terrible invention of Quayle's?" Burdette asked the sweating wretch.

"I will not tell you."

"As you like. I need not press that point. Your motive was a desire to benefit humanity?"

"To save civilization from destruction."

"I think I understand. Your case is clear."

"Am I insane?"

"You must give your mind a complete rest from worry. After this confession you will find it easier. In fact you will probably sleep better tonight than you have done since you left Quayle on the beach. Remember, you are my patient, and you are not guilty of murder. It has yet to be proved that Quayle is dead."

"He must be dead! The supplies cannot have lasted this long—it is absurd. And there was no water. But I did not kill him."

"Perhaps not, technically. Still, I should not care

to face a jury on such a charge. I have seen men hanged or sent to the chair for less."

"You will not tell?"

"I cannot. What you have told me is between doctor and patient."

"How much does Sheila know?"

"Nothing, consciously. My advice to you is to send her away before she begins to suspect openly."

"You believe it would be best to let her continue to think that Quayle died of the plague?"

"I don't know. Until we learn definitely that he is dead there is always the hope that he may be alive. For all we know he may be making his way back to civilization. I cannot believe that he is already in some city. A man with a grievance like his would not keep quiet. If he does survive, we shall hear of him first in Australia. Is it better to give your daughter this forlorn hope, or to let her live on in ignorance, and perhaps marry, always with the dim possibility of David returning to wreck her hard-won happiness? I am sure I don't know."

"If you tell her he is alive you will not betray me?"

"What good could it do? It would only make her hate you and therefore herself. No; if Quayle is still living, it obviously would be futile to look for him in Westralia. I must think of something else."

"What?" the banker persisted morbidly.

"At this moment I haven't the slightest idea. But I shall find a way out when I have had time to let all this settle. It should be no harder," he added with a

bitter smile, "than breaking the news to a mother that the last appeal has failed, and her son must be dragged to the electric chair—a duty which this civilization you have lied and murdered to preserve not infrequently forces on men of my profession. But let that go; it is merely my personal penalty for living and thinking. Your daughter's happiness is the one thing that counts. May I speak to her before I leave? She has gone to her room."

"What will you tell her?"

"That your health is in no immediate danger."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing, except possibly to make an appointment for tomorrow morning. By that time I shall have thought of a way out for her which will still leave you the remnants of her love."

"You swear?"

"I have given my word."

When Sheila descended at the maid's summons she found Burdette ready to leave.

"I just wanted to make your mind easy, Miss Cutts, before going home. Your father will be all right if he has a complete rest. We had a long talk. He is quite willing to put himself under my treatment."

"May I speak with him?"

"You had better not see him tonight. He is rather tired."

"When will you call again?"

"Possibly I may drop in tomorrow afternoon. By the way, could you be at my office at nine o'clock

tomorrow morning? You and I can talk over whatever seems best to be done."

"I shall be there."

"Very well, I shall count on you. Try to keep out of your father's way as much as possible. He needs to be alone, completely at rest."

"Thank you, doctor, for all you have done for us."

"It is nothing—simple routine work, that's all. Good night, Miss Cutts. You may sleep soundly this time."

With a smile he bowed himself out. Sheila looked at her watch. It was just half past twelve. The doctor had worked faster than she dreamed. It was almost a record. But the banker's cowardice had done ninety-nine per cent of the work. At gambling for money he was a past master; at gambling for his life he was a bungling novice.

As Cutts reached for the button to turn off the light before getting into bed, he leered at his image in the pier glass with an insane cunning.

"That fool thinks he's clever," he remarked to the darkness, referring to Burdette. "I am not down yet."

He was gloating over his presumed astuteness in omitting all mention of Barton from his confession.

CHAPTER XIII

RESTITUTION

In accordance with Burdette's hint, Sheila avoided her father the following morning. Having breakfasted early in bed she dressed to walk down to the doctor's office, feeling that the exercise would steady her nerves. She was about to open the front door when her father appeared in the hall. He too had risen early and was watching for her.

"Oh, Sheila," he called.

"Yes?"

"Off for golf this early?"

"No. I have an appointment at nine with Doctor Burdette, and I thought I would walk part of the way down."

"It's a good thing I caught you before you got away. Burdette rang me up before I was out of bed and asked me to cancel the appointment. He has been called out of town."

"Oh," said Sheila with evident disappointment. Then, after some hesitation, "I shall take a walk anyway now that I'm dressed. Probably the Jarvises will be up and ready. Good-bye. Expect me home for lunch."

Not giving her father an opportunity to reply she quickly closed the outer door behind her and walked

rapidly down the driveway to the avenue. Something in her father's tone and manner apprized her that whatever the whole truth of the matter might be, he certainly had not told it all. A fair guess at the true state of affairs flashed across her mind the instant Cutts announced that Burdette had cancelled her appointment. Her father, she noted instantly, had first ascertained where she was going. Before telling her of Burdette's alleged message he had asked whether she was "off for golf," a quite unnecessary question had he indeed known of her appointment with the doctor, for Sheila would have had no time for golf. It followed then that Cutts' question was a feeler sent out in the suspicion that she was again going to consult Burdette. Hence, as inevitably as a proposition in Euclid, the message from Burdette was a pure invention, in short a lie.

Sheila abandoned her intention of walking most of the way down to Burdette's office. Instead, she took a taxi and told the driver she would stand whatever fines he incurred by breaking the speed laws. Her thoughts during that rocket rush through the early morning traffic were distinctly unpleasant. So her father, as she had long suspected from his erratic actions, was not above lying to her. Why? All his meaningless generosity of the past several months loomed up before her mind in a stronger light, black and evil. That too was a lie. Why? What did her father wish to conceal from her? At the back of her consciousness a smothered voice strove to whisper a name, all but succeeded, and failed. Only a vague

uneasiness rose to the conscious level; the censor still kept the upper hand. One thing of all her troubled thoughts seemed firm and real beyond dispute. That morning her father had deliberately deceived her, and she must now discover what new development in his illness this mean deception portended. She was not angry, merely alarmed and sorry. As the reckless taxi drew up before the doctor's office she hastily dried her eyes and removed the traces of her distress. Burdette should find her a help, not a nuisance. Her poor father's health was the one thing that mattered.

"Dr. Burdette has not come in yet?" she asked the page who was busy tidying up the waiting room for the day.

The boy glanced at the clock.

"It is only a quarter to eight. The doctor generally gets here about nine. Did you have an appointment?"

"At nine o'clock, but I thought perhaps he might be here earlier this morning."

"The secretary should be here at eight. She will know."

"Can you tell me where I can reach the doctor by telephone?"

"At his hotel. Shall I call him for you?"

When Burdette answered the telephone Sheila explained that she merely wished to verify his message of that morning.

"What message?"

"Didn't you telephone to our house?"

There was a pause at the other end of the wire.

"I think I understand," Burdette finally answered.

"Please wait in my private office—not the public reception room—till I come down. I won't be ten minutes."

Sheila too understood. Her father had indeed lied as she suspected, otherwise Burdette would have given a plain answer. The certainty was more of a shock than she could have anticipated. It is one thing to theorize, another to know.

When Burdette joined her he seemed uneasy and unwilling to begin. Contrary to his habitual directness he made several trite remarks about the beautiful morning and the California weather in general. Sheila noted his distraction and asked if he were feeling well.

"I'm rather tired," he confessed. "Your case, if you care to know, kept me up most of the night."

"I'm sorry," she said.

"So am I," the doctor admitted significantly. "This is the hardest thing I ever had to do. However, let us get this mysterious telephone message out of the way first. Exactly what happened?"

In reply to her account of the episode with her father in the hall, Burdette remarked that he was not altogether surprised that something of the sort had happened.

"Like most nervous patients"—the doctor carefully avoided saying "insane"—"your father is sensitive about his illness. I told him last night that I should probably make an appointment with you for this morning. This is his way of taking matters into his own hands. On the whole I am not sorry. It will make what I have to do a little easier. Now, as I anticipate

after what has occurred that your father will pay me a personal visit at nine o'clock, we had better get another matter out of the way before he comes. Obviously you would not wish to encounter him here." He glanced at his watch. "A time limit on a difficult job usually makes it less hard. We have forty minutes before you must leave. Won't you take the armchair? You will find it more comfortable."

From Burdette's manner, deliberately assumed in order to prepare her at least partially for what was coming, Sheila inferred that she was in for an unpleasant forty minutes. Firmly compressing her lips she faced him, determined to take whatever he might give her like a Spartan. Burdette nervously lit a cigarette and mentally rehearsed his romance, the fruit of his anxious meditations during the small, wakeful hours of the morning.

"Good news," he began, "often is as much of a shock as bad. What I have to tell you is probably the happiest thing you could hope to hear. Nevertheless it will be a terrific shock. Are you ready?"

She nodded.

"Your father made a foolish mistake about Quayle. David may be alive."

Her eyes closed, and she swayed slightly, saying nothing. As Burdette put out a hand to steady her, she drew herself up, rigid.

"If you can follow what I am saying," he hurried on, "I shall tell it all at once. I said that David *may* be alive. We don't know definitely that he *is*. He did not die in Singapore of the plague. Your father last

saw him in Australia—Melbourne. If he is still in Australia you should be able to find him by advertising in the newspapers of all the leading cities—Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney—all of them. He was going to Australia to begin life anew—probably under another name. If he is still alive, and if you locate him, you must be prepared to make restitution to him for your father's mistake. You owe him everything, and everything must come from you. Now, if that much is fairly clear, we can go on with the rest in a minute. It is nothing to what I have just told you."

"Is it about my father?"

"Yes, but remember that he is a sick man, not himself. I firmly believe that he has not been responsible for his actions at any time during the past five or six years. You can take that on my professional word. So you must not judge him as you would if he were in normal health and in full possession of his faculties. What he did to Quayle was not the act of a sane man. Make what allowances you can. Look at him through my eyes."

"What did he do to David?"

The doctor hurried over his carefully prepared fabrication, trusting that Sheila's joy at the first part of his revelation would blind her to the improbabilities of the second. Not for a million dollars would he have told her the truth while her father still lived. Some day perhaps it might become necessary for her to know everything, but certainly not at present. His fiction was far from sound, yet it was the best that he had been able to devise under the circumstances.

"David," he replied, tacking together various suggestions from Cutts' first, false confession of the previous night, "incurred your father's displeasure over a certain invention. To your father this thing which David had designed appeared utterly inhuman, anti-social, and fit only to be suppressed. Failing to bring Quayle round to what he considered—honestly, I believe—the only decent point of view, your father offered to buy the invention outright for a handsome sum, on condition that David never should make any attempt to use the fiendish thing himself or permit anyone else to learn of its existence. Quayle accepted. A week later he returned, saying he knew where he could sell the invention for ten times what he had received. To spare your feelings, I shall omit details from this point on. Your father was blackmailed into meeting Quayle's demands that he equal this offer."

"I don't believe it!"

"Hear the rest before you form an opinion," the doctor hurried on. "No less than three times Quayle successfully extorted huge sums of money from your father. For although your father had immediately destroyed all traces of the invention when he purchased it, he knew that Quayle could reproduce his work in less than a year. This could not keep up indefinitely. David's motive, he declared, was his wish to make himself your financial equal before marrying you."

"That is absurd!"

"I have listened to stranger stories in my professional work, and none of them was absurd. When

you have seen as much of the workings of the human mind under the stress of love, passion, greed, vanity and hate as I have, you will be entitled to an opinion, not before. So please follow what I am telling you. Your father set a trap for Quayle. He concealed witnesses in his private office who took down in shorthand every word of Quayle's last, outrageous attempt to levy blackmail. The rest was easy—for your father. Quayle was in his power. Unless David consented to pass out of your life forever, he was to be arrested for blackmail. To save himself from prison and life-long disgrace for his felony Quayle consented to lose his identity and to start life anew in Australia.

"I need not bother you with the details of a false death certificate and the rest. They have nothing to do with the main issue."

"If what you say is true," Sheila objected, "why did you advise me that everything must come from me?"

"I can't go into it now, but your father brought his difficulties on himself. He tried to persuade David that you did not really love him, that you looked down on him for being unable to make money—I needn't elaborate."

"And you expect me to believe that David thought that of me?"

"Your father persuaded him that it was true. Well, our time is about up. The main thing is that Quayle may still be alive. Look for him in Australia. Your whole future happiness is in your own hands. Your immediate task is to occupy your mind with the search

I have suggested. Take one or two friends with you for company, to keep you from brooding, but tell them nothing of your true mission. Keep in touch with me. I will let you know how your father gets on. And further, I urge you to leave the United States without seeing your father again. A meeting in the immediate future, before this has had time to heal between you, might be disastrous to the health of both of you, certainly to his. Well, I am afraid you must leave. It is nine o'clock. You can stay with the Jarvises until we make the necessary arrangements for your going to Australia."

For some moments Sheila sat brooding in silence. What she thought in those stunned moments she hardly knew herself.

"How ill is my father?" she asked at length.

"That is a very hard question to answer without giving a wrong impression to a layman. If your father is crossed he may have a serious relapse. But if all goes as I think it may, he should make a complete recovery."

She received this hopeful prediction in silence, scarcely daring to think. Unknown to herself the secret doubt which had fed upon her life-long affection for her father was rapidly gaining substance and nearing its term. He and she must part without a word of farewell. It all seemed wise, but why, she was too stunned, too weary, to reason out.

"Will business be bad for him?" she asked.

"On the contrary. The closer he sticks to his usual routine the easier will it be for him to regain his

normal health. I shall insist that he return at once to New York to take up his regular work. Like you he must not brood over the past. It is done, and it cannot be undone. To take some of the strain off his mind I shall advise that he hire an extra secretary. He must not worry. I shall also take certain other precautions—mere professional red tape. You shan't be bothered with any of this. Everything will be all right. So don't fret. Look for David and you will find yourself. Is it all clear now?"

"I shall ask you just one thing," she replied. "Your story is a poor disguise of the truth. Some day I shall learn what is between David and my father. But let that pass. I believe you think your hiding of the truth is for my own good. Perhaps you are right. I don't know, and I don't greatly care. Answer me truthfully on your honor this one thing: Is David alive?"

"I do not know."

"Does my father know?"

"No. I feel sure he does not."

"But both of you honestly believe he may be?"

"I do. As for your father, I cannot say."

"Then I shall take your advice. Will you please tell my father I am not angry, and that I understand he was ill when he did whatever he did to David?"

"I'll explain. Don't hope for too much."

"I shan't. Good-bye, and please believe that I do not thank you simply because I can find no words."

She hurried out by the side exit just as the clock struck nine. Burdette lit a cigar, took a puff, and

threw it away. It tasted like burning rags. He tried a cigarette with no greater success. Finally he resigned himself to waiting idly and nervously for the visit which he considered a mathematical certainty.

At ten minutes past nine the secretary announced that Mr. Cutts wished to see the doctor.

"Show him in."

Burdette motioned his caller to a straightbacked chair facing the light.

"I see you passed a good night," he remarked, critically examining his patient's non-committal eyes. "I was expecting your daughter at nine. Did she send any message?"

For a moment the banker's face bore a crafty, feline look, but only for a moment. That transient reversion to the cunning brute did not pass unobserved. Burdette silently sustained his verdict of separating Sheila immediately, as he had done, from her father.

"Yes," Cutts agreed, as a mild beginning to his diplomatic overtures, "I slept splendidly. So well, in fact, that my daughter noted the improvement at breakfast, and suggested that I come down instead of herself to keep her appointment."

"Did she tell you why I made the appointment with her?"

"She said you and she planned to talk over my health. But my positively disgusting robustness this morning convinced her that I am in no need of medical attention, and she sent me down to tell you so."

Cutts significantly drew out his check book.

"What is your fee, doctor?"

"Make it a hundred thousand dollars," Burdette suggested casually.

"Rather steep, isn't it?" Cutts demurred, raising his eyebrows, but nevertheless preparing to write.

"Oh, I don't think it's too much for such a remarkable cure as yours," Burdette retorted. "You were a pretty sick man last night."

"Was I? Now that you mention it I do seem to remember talking a great deal of rubbish. Do you happen to recall what I said?"

"Every word."

"That is strange, because I have forgotten even its general drift. You see I have been under a great strain these last four or five months. Anxiety over my financial obligations to M. Poyère—representative in chief of the French bankers, you know—must have upset my nerves. So naturally I may have talked a great deal of nonsense at times."

"Undoubtedly," the doctor admitted, to humor him and draw him out.

Cutts toyed invitingly with his fountain pen, making suggestive flourishes in the air above the virgin check.

"After this," he promised, "I shall be perfectly level. You need not be apprehensive of a relapse. That little deal I put through yesterday evening—the extension of time M. Poyère granted me—has straightened out my difficulties." He paused for a second to give his coming question its full value. "You find nothing wrong with me now, doctor, except perhaps a slight nervous strain from overwork?" Receiving only a cold stare, he blundered on. "You have done so much

for me that I shall be eternally grateful to you. I trust this little matter of a fee won't stand between us. Shall we make it two?"

"Two what?"

"Hundred thousand, of course," Cutts replied with a blush.

Burdette lit a cigarette and inhaled several puffs before replying. When he did, he ignored the banker's leading question.

"You are farther gone than I thought," he began. "Put that pen and that check book away, man. How am I to prevent you from hanging yourself if you will persist in giving yourself away? Learn to guard your tongue. The meaning of all this, I suppose, is that you wish to repudiate your confession?"

"Confession, doctor? I made no confession. If you are not feeling well this morning I shan't bother you further."

"You are not bothering me in the least. So you think you made no confession? There were no witnesses to our consultation, if that is what you mean. True! Legally the case is yours. But medically it is mine, and I intend treating it as it should be treated. I know as well as you do that I cannot swear out a warrant for your arrest on what you told me last night."

"Whatever that may have been," Cutts interrupted, "you don't expect me to remember the idle maunderings of a temporary nervous breakdown, do you?"

"Of course not."

"Then what are you going to do about it?"

"First," the doctor replied evenly, "let us be clear on this attempt of yours to buy me off. As I acknowledged a moment ago, the law is all on your side. So far as the police are concerned I can do nothing, and I don't wish to do anything. Why then did you attempt to bribe me? Obviously you do not wish your daughter to learn what you did to Quayle, and you think I may tell her the truth unless you make it worth my while to hold my tongue. That in itself is pretty clear evidence of an overtaxed mind. Can't you see that if you paid even a million today, I could come back tomorrow for more?

"See what you have done by your stupid folly, and learn a lesson to be more careful of your tongue in future. You have revealed the truth completely. Last night I only suspected. Now you have put the facts plainly before me. You did not destroy Quayle's invention as you swore to me that you did. You and your confederate are exploiting it to your mutual profit.

"The bribe you have now tried to force on me was to buy my silence to your daughter. She is intelligent. Suppose she were to learn the truth of how you betrayed Quayle. Before long she would suspect your true motive—to rob Quayle of his invention. Would she permit you to fatten on your theft? Though she is your daughter I believe she would not, and so do you. So you could afford to pay me any sum to hold my tongue.

"It follows, of course, that this invention is tremendously valuable. That is obvious. And it follows

also, I believe, although I am less confident on this point, that this thing which you stole from Quayle is not so terribly dangerous as you maintain. Otherwise I fail to see how a man with so little courage as you have would dare to exploit it. Now, I think, we understand one another better than we did last night."

Cutts assumed an attitude of importance.

"You talk quite well when you are excited, doctor. Your theories would do credit to an amateur detective. But what are you going to do about it in a practical way?"

Burdette rose, and reached for the telephone.

"I am going to cable the medical authorities in Singapore to make a drastic examination of the circumstances under which Quayle's death certificate was issued. If in their judgment there was any irregularity, they will order Quayle's supposed grave opened and the body exhumed. If his body is not there they will then turn the police loose on the ex-captain of your yacht. He should not be hard to find."

Cutts did not turn a hair. He was himself again. Not for nothing had he gambled with huge fortunes and spotless reputations for thirty years.

"You must be reasonable, Dr. Burdette," he said evenly. "For my daughter's sake let us come to some compromise. I stand firmly on my repudiation of everything I said last night. Nevertheless I cannot afford to have you take the preposterous steps you threaten. For if poor David's grave is opened, the scandal must certainly reach Sheila. The shock to her already overbalanced sensibilities may very well upset

her reason. So understand, doctor," he concluded, drawing himself up to his full dignity, "if I submit to your outrageous interference it is merely because you have the usual advantage of the blackmailer."

"Call me any name you like," Burdette replied, relinquishing the telephone and resuming his seat. "I do not intend to fence with you. These are my terms, which you will accept: For at least one year you must be separated completely from your daughter. It is not safe for the mental health of either of you to be together. If at the end of the year you have not fully recovered, the separation must be prolonged until you are cured."

Cutts began to bluster.

"What right have you," he sputtered, "to dictate my relations to my own daughter?"

The doctor coldly ignored the outburst and continued to pass sentence.

"As for yourself you can take your choice of two things. You shall not have the opportunity of treating another human being as you did Quayle. Either you go into a private sanitarium at once, or you employ two competent male nurses, whom I will send, to watch over you day and night. One of these can pass as your valet, the other as your confidential clerk or secretary. So you will not be humiliated in public. The nurses will make it part of their duty to see that you do not talk yourself into the electric chair. Sane or insane you would have a hard struggle to save your life should it ever be proved that Quayle is indeed dead. For a full year you must avoid all social

functions. You can see your friends in your own house, and your business associates at your office. If you visit their offices, the confidential clerk must go with you."

"You expect me to submit to such outrageous and unwarranted espionage?"

"You know the alternative."

"As I said, you have all the blackmailer's advantage. Against such weapons I am powerless. For the sake of my daughter's sanity I must submit. But as surely as there is a God in Heaven I shall have justice in the end."

"I sincerely hope that you do, and I have not the slightest doubt that you will. For one thing, you are an exceedingly incautious man with your tongue. Now, which do you prefer, the nurses or the sanitarium?"

"The nurses." Cutts spat the words.

"Then that is settled. They will report for duty at one o'clock this afternoon. I shall pick you a confidential clerk who plays an excellent game of golf, and a valet whose chess is hard to beat. So you will have compensations."

Cutts looked murderous.

"You damned blackmailer!" He spat like a trapped cougar. "By what authority do you set yourself up as a dictator over my private life?"

"None that need concern you. As a matter of fact I am more interested in saving your daughter's life from ruin than I am in making things more endurable

for you. Now," he continued, "before arranging the details with regard to you, I have a little confession of my own to make. You will not see your daughter again before she returns from Australia. You guess, I take it, that Miss Cutts was not deceived by your lie this morning?"

Burdette then recounted all that had taken place that morning between himself and Sheila. As he listened to that damning verdict on his last, futile attempt at diplomacy, Cutts became panic stricken. When Burdette finished, the hapless wretch was in a sweat and trembling violently.

"Sheila must not go to Australia!" he groaned.

"Why?" Burdette demanded.

"You don't understand!" the banker burst out passionately. "If Quayle is found, I am broken."

"Quayle may be more generous than you would be," the doctor suggested. "Give your daughter credit for what she undoubtedly has, as fine a loyalty as I have ever seen in a human being. Can't you trust her to soften his revenge into forgiveness?"

"What does it matter whether I am forgiven? You must believe what I say! I am not caring what happens to me personally. All that I have done has been unselfish. Believe it or not as you like, it is the whole, honest, God's truth. Without betraying confidences which I am in honor bound to respect, I cannot tell you everything. But I swear that if Quayle is found then civilization is lost. When I go down the world follows me. And if Quayle returns I am

crushed. Then you will see the sudden end of twenty centuries or more of slow, bitter progress toward the light. Sheila *must* not go to Australia!"

Burdette studied his patient long in silence before replying.

"Well," he said at length, "I can see no grounds for undoing what I have done. Your daughter *shall* go to Australia. Injustices are best righted one at a time. We shall begin with Quayle. When we have made what restitution is possible to him we can look after the vague millions you call humanity."

Cutts bit his white lips and bowed his head.

"If civilization is destroyed," he groaned, "you are responsible."

"Very well," Burdette replied. "I accept the responsibility. As a matter of fact whatever danger there may be is greatly diminished by taking the control away from you. You bungle. Now, let us arrange the immediate details."

It was finally agreed that Cutts should return the next day to New York "on business" accompanied by his new valet and confidential clerk. A regular occupation, Burdette declared, was essential for his patient's health. But this agreement was not reached until after heated persuasion on Burdette's part. And as a final precaution he insisted that Cutts deed over to Sheila at once all of the money, bonds, stocks and real property which he had intended leaving her at his death. Any will that he might make could be too easily set aside if ever the true state of his health became common knowledge. Since the All American

had leapt like a giant to the top of the commercial world, Cutts' fortunes were once more blossoming; so there was no mean sum to be disposed of. Sheila already had ample for her immediate needs, having inherited her mother's very considerable private fortune.

Cutts left for New York the next morning on the early train. Sheila followed in a week with the Jarvises, who had joyfully accepted her invitation for a cruise to Australia.

Twelve days after she had said goodbye to Burdette, Sheila and her guests were steaming out of New York harbor. The Captain of her yacht, the restored "pensioner" of her father's, promised to show the party the cities of Australia as the ordinary, sophisticated globetrotter never sees them. His knowledge of the seaports of the world was truly remarkable, much of it having been gained when he was a young junior lieutenant in the British navy.

Two days out from New York Sheila decided that she might now safely confide in her Captain. Entering the chartroom she found him enjoying a quiet smoke. As always, he was glad to see her, and cleared a stool for her to sit down.

"Captain," she began, carefully closing the door, "can I trust you?"

He stared at her in amazement. He had played with her when she was a very small girl. To him she was almost a daughter.

"Don't you know me by now?" he asked, rather hurt.

"I believe I do," she admitted. "Yet it is little more than a week since I learned that our best friends will sometimes betray us."

"But I am just like your father to you!" the Captain expostulated. "Why, I remember your mother when you were just a baby, and she was no older than you are now. If you don't know by this time that I would go through fire and water for you, you ought to be spanked. What sort of mischief are you in now? I'll get you out if it's humanly possible."

She gave him a strange look which made his flesh creep. Sensing her desperate earnestness he silently motioned her to be seated, and stood studying her face.

"What is it?" he asked. "You can trust me, I swear."

"I shall trust you," she said slowly, "because I must have help, and I believe in you. What I tell you must never pass your lips. Do you swear to keep this a secret between only you and me?"

"I swear," he promised, solemnly raising his right hand.

"I am going to Australia to look for David. The Jarvises do not know this."

He stared at her speechless, and his blood froze. Was she mad?

"David Quayle?" he whispered.

She nodded.

"But David is dead, Sheila. He died in Singapore,

months and months ago, of the plague. Surely you remember?"

"David did not die as you say. Please do not ask me how I know. I shall never tell a living soul. I know what you are thinking. Can't you see that my mind is not unbalanced?"

"What am I to do?" he parried.

"Use everything you know to search for him in the Australian ports. If David is alive he will probably be living in Australia under an assumed name. You knew him well. Employ detectives, advertise in the papers—anything!—only find him. Keep my name out of it all until you succeed or," she broke down, "fail."

"There, there," he said, patting her shoulder. "Don't cry. I shan't ask you any questions. An old salt like me knows enough to obey orders without arguing like a sea lawyer. I'll find him for you. Let me spend what money I need, and I'll bring him back to you if he is anywhere in Australia. Bear up, girl! We're not down yet."

Throughout the rest of the voyage whenever she could steal away from her guests, Sheila spent hours with the Captain planning her campaign; and long before the *Sheila* slipped like a swift white bird through the Suez Canal their plans had taken definite, reasonable shape.

The moment Cutts arrived in New York he called up his office and inquired for Barton.

Barton over the telephone was polite but short.

"I shall be over the first thing tomorrow morning to see you. Will you be at the office?"

The banker rightly interpreted the deferential inquiry as a command. The next morning, pale and shaky, he reached his private office, accompanied by his new "confidential clerk," promptly at eight. At half past eleven Barton appeared, stern and angry.

"Why did you come back before I sent for you?" he demanded under his breath, with a glance at the stalwart clerk at a desk in the far corner.

"My doctor ordered me to resume my regular routine for the sake of my health."

"Is this your bodyguard?" Barton demanded with a nod toward the muscular clerk. "What are you afraid of? Me?"

"That is Mr. Thomas, my new secretary."

"Ask him to leave the room. I have something to tell you about the aquarium."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," Cutts retorted. "Mr. Thomas is entirely trustworthy. There is no reason why he should overhear any business of a confidential nature. We can withdraw to the farther end of the room. After this either he or my valet, James, accompanies me during conferences."

"Very well," Barton agreed, as if it were nothing to him. "Bring a squad of them if you like. Only, to save your neck, don't let them overhear you trying to hang yourself."

"How are the tanks progressing?"

"First rate."

"I shall come over to see for myself next week. For the present you may remain in charge."

"Oh," said Barton with mock respect. "So I am taking orders from you, am I? Since when?"

"Not orders," Cutts hastened to reassure him. "I merely wish to co-operate."

"That goes," Barton sneered. "Co-operate all you like. And if your clerk and your valet get too nosey I'll co-operate with them too. See the point? Use horse sense and I'll let you play with me as long as you behave. We talked all this out before you left for Pasadena. Want to go over the ground again?"

The banker cringed.

"I am sure you will be reasonable," he murmured. "My only wish is to expedite matters."

"I'll be reasonable," Barton promised. "Reason's my long suit. Anything more this morning? No? Well, I'm off. Take it from me, your bruiser sitting there like a converted pug doesn't worry me a little bit. Good morning, Mr. Cutts."

Barton bowed himself out, somewhat disturbed despite his bravado. This new move on Cutts' part puzzled him. The presence of the "bodyguard" complicated matters. What was Cutts up to in his crazy way? Well, whatever it might be, the chemist reflected, he could easily circumvent it. Cutts was a bungling idiot. Provided only he could be taught to hold his tongue he could do no great harm.

For the next week the banker settled down to business as if nothing had happened to mar his self-respect. The valet slept and rested in the daytime, the

clerk took his recreation at night. It was a twelve-hour job for each of them. Their short reports by night-letter kept Burdette informed of his patient's daily progress.

Having grown friendly and confidential with the men, Cutts confided to James as the three started for Long Island, that he, Cutts, was not going on a mere junket to his summer home, but was bound thither on a mission of the profoundest significance for the future of civilization.

"My technical advisor, Doctor Barton, and I," he asserted, "are engaged on a great work for the uplift of humanity."

"Indeed?" the diplomatic James replied.

"The Cutts Aquarium, as I shall call it when completed," the banker vouchsafed, "will, I feel sure, go down in history as the greatest influence for good which our age has seen."

"Fish *are* interesting," James admitted.

"They are indeed," Cutts agreed with a deep, deep smile.

That night James' report to Burdette contained the technical phrase "delusions of grandeur."

For once in his long and honorable career as a guardian of the insane the impeccable James had missed his guess by a considerable margin.

Part III
INTERNATIONAL

CHAPTER XIV

SUSPECTED

A FEW weeks before Cutts adjourned with his secretary and his valet to Long Island to co-operate with Barton on the aquarium which was to do so much for the good of the human race, a stalwart, ill-kempt man, yellow-bearded and taciturn, stalked into the Sydney branch of Blaisdell's Bank and asked for the manager.

"What is your business?" the dapper little cashier chirped.

"My own. Where's the manager of this bank?"

"None of your business," the cashier flippantly retorted, and went on with his work.

The stranger glanced about him. Seeing "Manager" in gilt letters on an office door, he strode toward it, opened the door, and walked in. The manager looked up from his desk, puzzled.

"Mr——?" he began inquiringly, trying to recall what appointment he had forgotten.

"King. Do you buy dust?"

"Dust?"

"Gold dust."

"We sometimes make arrangements with responsible parties to dispose of their gold for cash in the usual

way. You are a stranger in Sydney? I don't recall——"

"I will sell about one thousand pounds."

"One thousand pounds sterling?"

"Weight. Sixteen thousand ounces."

The manager greeted this announcement with a marked and ominous silence. This stranger's face seemed honest enough behind the yellow beard. Still, unannounced tatterdemalions offering gold in thousand pound lots are not common, even in Australia.

"Do you know about how much a thousand pounds of gold are worth?"

"Three hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"I see you are an American, Mr. King. You understand of course that neither this bank nor any other in Australia can transact business with you until you identify yourself?"

There was an interrogative pause, which King ignored. Slightly flustered, the manager continued.

"For example, we must be satisfied that you are the legal owner of the gold you offer. Are you a miner?"

"At times."

"Where did you get this gold?"

"Out back."

"That's rather vague. 'Out back' might mean anywhere in several thousand square miles. Can't you be more definite? By the way, will you sit down?"

"Thanks, Mr. ——?"

"Williams," the manager supplied. "Now, if you do not care to say where your mine is, you can at

least give me the names of two persons who will identify you?"

"I don't care to go into that question. If you will handle my business on a five per cent commission basis, it is yours. If not, I shall go elsewhere."

"But how am I to satisfy myself that you have not committed a robbery? There have been numerous petty thefts of late, in the Kalgoorlie region, for instance, to say nothing of more serious losses at some of the smaller goldfields. You force me to speak out, Mr. King."

"Report me to the police."

"I shall. Where are you living?"

"At the Salvation Army Refuge."

"And you have a thousand pounds of gold dust? Ha! ha!"

"You don't expect a sheepshearer out of work to have a fortune in gold, do you? No? Well neither do any of the other blockheads I see in this God-forsaken hole. That's why I still have my dust. Do you take my business? Yes or no?"

"Yes. If the police can find nothing against you, I'll buy your dust. When can you deliver it?" he asked with heavy sarcasm.

"Tomorrow, between ten and eleven. Good morning."

He was gone before Williams recovered his conceit. This man King had taken his sarcasms at their face value. A curious and disagreeable flavor lingered on his mind. King, while not openly rude, had indicated by his brusque manner and expressive eyes that the

banker was not a welcome object to have in the same room with himself. Williams somehow felt belittled. Looking back over the interview he saw that he had been on the defensive from the start, and that he had taken decidedly the worst of the encounter. Well, he would call in the police. If they found nothing suspicious about the man, he would stick by his agreement. It meant a handsome profit on nothing, a temptation which few of us can resist. Having rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was awake, Williams telephoned to the police to investigate a certain man King, supposedly lodging at the Salvation Army Refuge.

As eleven o'clock approached the next morning, the police detective waiting in Williams' office grinned at the manager.

"Now you understand why we found nothing against your friend King. His gold dust is all moonshine. While we stand here like a couple of idiots waiting for him to show up, he is probably offering to sell a ton of opals to the Bank of Sydney. That's what he was doing all last night—digging opals. No wonder he didn't roost at the Refuge."

A clerk entered to announce that Mr. King wished to know where he was to deliver his coal.

"I told him we didn't need any coal, but he said you had ordered half a ton."

When Williams and the detective reached the pavement they found a heavy, two horse dray, loaded with what looked like twenty sacks of coal.

"Where do you want it?"

"Drive round to the side door," Williams directed. He could be perfectly cool outwardly even when he was seething inwardly.

King pulled up at the side door.

"This man," he nodded at the detective, "is from the police, I suppose. He can see that I am not robbed. The gold thieves have been getting bolder the past four weeks."

He began methodically ripping open the sacks and dumping the blocks of wood with which they were crammed. From the bottom of each sack he extracted a small bag of kangaroo hide.

"Count these," he said, indicating the bags, "and write me a receipt while I carry them in."

He lifted one in each hand and followed Williams into his office. The detective picked up two more, and in five minutes the three men were alone in the office behind locked doors with the twenty bags. King reached for the telephone.

"Send a man to Blaisdell's Bank for the team King hired yesterday morning. You can keep the deposit for your pay. The horses have been watered, but not fed since last night." He hung up and turned to Williams. "If you will fetch your gold scales we can weigh this."

The weighing proceeded in uncanny silence. King took no notice of the detective's scrutiny till the last bag was emptied.

"Is my picture in your rogues' gallery?"

The detective reluctantly admitted that it was not. King made no comment.

"Write me a receipt for the full weight," he said to Williams, "and I will call for my money the day after tomorrow at twelve. Have it ready in notes, please, not gold. You will have plenty of time to get the assayer's report."

Williams handed him the receipt. With a curt nod to the manager, King unlocked the side door and stepped out, leaving the two men to stare at one another.

"Is he a miner?" Williams asked.

The detective shook his head. "No, nor a sheep man. If he had robbed this stuff at one haul, all Australia would have heard of it. Is he a fence for the petty thieves? We have no record of him or of anyone like him. I wonder what his game is?"

They wondered still more when they got the assayer's report. The entire thousand pounds was practically pure gold.

Prompt to the second, King called for his money.

"Will you come to lunch with me?" Williams asked, handing him the notes.

"No. I hate bankers. Good day."

With close on three hundred and twenty thousand dollars in his pockets, King turned his back on the manager and strode off to the Bank of Sydney. There he rented a safe deposit box and stowed away his notes.

For the next seven weeks King's eccentric activities furnished the Sydney police with food for endless and unprofitable speculation. The short-spoken, bearded giant made no effort to conceal his movements. On

the contrary he seemed to go out of his way to court notoriety. In his dealings with merchants he was curt to the point of insult. But that he paid spot cash he would have been shown the door. Either the man was an incurable misanthrope or, for reasons of his own, he found it profitable to ape the part of one having only scorn and bitterness for his fellow men. To the police spies, whom he seemed to detect instantly by a sixth sense, he was brutally outspoken. He did his best to pique the puzzled curiosity with which they watched his strange business transactions by a parade of contemptuous indifference. The strange assortment of odds and ends which he was buying, "to be delivered later," was no miner's outfit. Nor, so far as the police could see, was it the stock in trade of any other profession. They could make nothing of him.

He exasperated them on another count. The only mortals to whom King showed the least spark of human feeling were the occasional "civilized" blacks who drifted into town. These he loaded down with tobacco and the small luxuries they craved, and sent them on their way praising his name. The police naturally enough drew the conclusion that King was the go-between for a clever gang of black thieves. As the blacks proved dumb they decided to watch him more closely. Were King's erratic purchases merely a clever blind to throw them off the trail?

Their helpless curiosity reached the agony point with the suspect's last business deal. Of all utterly useless things that he might have squandered half his

fortune on, King had apparently selected the craziest. He paid cash for a rust-eaten, rat-infested, foul-smelling old steamer which had lain rotting in the harbor for two years with only a drunken watchman aboard.

All of the nondescript junk which he had accumulated during six weeks' strenuous extravagance, was now piled onto lighters and transferred to the tramp. Then followed four months of frenzied "repairs." The deck plates were ripped off by a gang of shipwrights hired at top wages by King; bulkheads and partitions were torn out, the old boilers were scrapped, hoisted from their beds and shipped out to sea to be dumped, and bit by bit the miscellaneous junk he had bought was stowed haphazard into the roomy hold.

His next move was suggestive, or would have been to anyone not laboring under a pre-conceived theory. He abruptly discharged every man whom he had so far employed; then, two or three at a time, he hired expert mechanics to do particular jobs. A particular job was no sooner done than the workmen were dismissed, and their work was carefully shrouded up in tarpaulins from the prying eyes of the next gang. Although no two of the curious workmen could agree as to King's purpose, the entire staff was unanimous that the boss himself knew exactly what he was about. And with a knowing wink the police agreed.

King was clever, they admitted. But he couldn't fool them. All this elaborate mystification in the old hulk might be good camouflage, but it wasn't good enough. Not by half, it wasn't. What was the mean-

ing of his last piece of foolishness, the short submarine cable from the shore to the revamped hull? Why, it was as plain as day. King was planning to direct his gang by telephone, while he lay aboard waiting for his accomplices to row out some dark night with their loot. He could keep it up for a year or two. Having accumulated a tidy fortune from the spoils of innumerable petty thefts, he and the rest could get up steam and disappear.

This beautifully consistent theory was punctured by a single ill-natured remark. One of the mechanics, an unimaginative, practical man, who had helped to install the cable connections at the shore end, pointed out that telephone messages are not transmitted at eighty thousand volts pressure. King's electrical outfit happened to be of precisely that dangerous calibre. If telephone messages were his aim he must be contemplating a chat with Mars.

Nevertheless the police, being themselves short on imagination, stuck to their theory with all the hard valor of common-sense and the invincible stupidity of blind ignorance.

Presently their simple courage was rewarded. A reckless daylight robbery in the Kalgoorlie region relieved the messengers of about twenty-five pounds of gold. Three of the gang escaped; the remaining seven were riddled like colanders in the scuffle. Although serious, the loss of the gold was a mere trifle compared to what the bandits failed to lift.

The astute police doubled the force detailed to spy on King. In one way he was a most valuable ally

to the robbers; he distracted attention from the operators in the goldfields. The guard was efficient, if nothing else. It would be impossible for any human being, black or white, by daylight or by dark, to reach the hulk without their knowledge. Like good sleuth hounds they sat down and waited.

King let them wait. For two weeks he never left the hulk. From the shore nothing could be seen, and the prowlers in innocent pleasure craft reported that the hulk was as silent as a mausoleum. A small launch, moored to the port side, had not been used since the day King went aboard alone.

Just as the police began to suspect that King had committed suicide as a fitting finale to his eccentric behavior, he suddenly appeared on deck. Twenty pairs of field glasses from as many hiding places on shore were instantly trained on the suspect. Either he was unaware that he was being watched, or his acting was perfect. He hauled in the painter, bringing the launch alongside the hulk. Then he let down a rope ladder and tumbled into the launch. He cast off and headed toward the wharf.

On reaching the wharf he tied up, and hailed a loafer. The nearest spy saw King give the sundowner some money, but did not overhear what was said.

The man turned and walked off up-town followed, of course, by the spy. King did not leave the pier. Unconscious that he was being closely watched he stood where he had landed, with his eyes fixed on the hulk to see that it was not boarded in his absence.

In about half an hour the seedy messenger, followed

by three shuffling tramps, returned with a heavy sack on his back. King took the sack and gave the bearer the second half of his promised pay. He was about to heave the sack into the launch when the three tramps leapt upon him.

King wrestled like an enraged bear, but the detectives captured the sack. Five more, eager for their share of the glory, mixed in the scuffle. Panting and speechless with rage, and powerless in the grip of the brawny five, King saw his precious sack upended and dumped on the filthy planks.

Out tumbled in colorful confusion half a dozen cabbages, several rotund beets, two dozen head of the finest lettuce, a few pounds of string beans, and potatoes innumerable. King all but frothed at the mouth. A month's supply of greenstuff lay squandered in the offal. He started to swear, but the first terrific oath broke squarely in the middle and ended in a wholesouled shout of laughter. He had recognized one of the detectives as his friend from Blaisdell's Bank.

But those astute Sherlocks were not to be bluffed by a cheap exhibition of bravado. Having coolly opened their pocket knives they slashed at the innocent potatoes, made salad of the lettuce and string beans, coleslaw of the cabbages, and finally, in a horrible orgy of professional zeal, they disembowelled the beets. For yards all about them the wharf was littered with massacred vegetables, nothing more.

King felt his arms suddenly released. His persecutors vanished in the crowd which had materialized out of nothing from nowhere. He hired the tramp

again. This time there was no investigation of the sack. King returned with it unmolested to his mysterious hulk. And for a week afterwards the detectives kicked themselves whenever they thought of the incident. Of course, they reasoned, it was all a clever trick. Naturally the first sack of vegetables would be vegetables and nothing more. But what about the second? King had caught them in a booby-trap of the most elementary kind. Freely admitting to themselves that they one and all were imbeciles, they vowed to be less feeble minded over the next smuggled consignment of gold dust. They would catch that man King yet.

As for King, he now seemed to grow indifferent to observation. Through their spy glasses the police observed that he spent several hours a day on deck, smoking and enjoying the sunshine. He even carried up his noon and evening meals and ate in the fresh air.

The police were not the only puzzled heads in Sydney. The clerks at the power plant wondered what earthly use King could have for the vast quantities of electricity he was consuming. Growing apprehensive about his ability to meet the rapidly mounting bill, the superintendent ordered King's current cut off. The response was immediate. Again the launch appeared at the wharf. As before King remained on the wharf, keeping an eye on the hulk.

This time the envoy carried a short, emphatic note to the superintendent of the power plant. In response to that pointed epistle the superintendent appeared in

person. Only half a dozen brief sentences passed between merchant and customer. Very red in the neck the superintendent walked away with a pocketful of notes in payment for past deliveries of electric current and future service at the same rate for eight months to come. He was stunned and resentful. King had made no effort to conceal his dislike of the company's business methods. The superintendent had half a mind to report this ungentlemanly bounder's doings to the police. On second thought he decided to keep his business to himself. Beyond a tongue-lashing that had left his self-respect raw from heels to hair he had nothing against the "rotten cad." Moreover he had accepted the bounder's money. Praying that some exasperated merchant would some day bore a bullet hole through his uncivilized tormentor, he banked the notes and had a drink. It is little short of miraculous what a stiff tot of whiskey with a dash of vermouth will do to the civilized mind as a restorative of self-respect.

The detectives had witnessed the pleasant transaction, but had not thought it necessary to eavesdrop or to interfere. Probably King was complaining about the notoriously bad quality of the electric light service furnished by the company. And anyway, like Caesar's wife, the superintendent was alleged to be above suspicion. He was virtuous to a fault. On the whole the police, not by any means poor sports, sympathized with King. They resumed their cat-like watching of the hulk. When would the rash mouse forget himself and venture dangerously far from his hole?

One morning, four weeks later, in the first cool breeze of dawn, the watchers saw a trim steam yacht, white as a bride, steal into the harbor. She came to anchor a hundred yards east of the hulk, and slightly nearer shore, just as King appeared on deck to get his morning breath of fresh air. Through their glasses the police saw him walk forward, apparently to read the name, invisible to them, on the stern of the yacht. Having satisfied his curiosity he walked back and disappeared below decks. They saw no more of him till he came up as usual to eat his lunch. The name which King read was

SHEILA
OF
NEW YORK

From his actions it apparently meant nothing to him. He went about his routine as usual.

This was the *Sheila's* first visit to Sydney. Up to now the only Australian port the yacht had visited was Melbourne, where the Captain spent weeks thoroughly combing the city for traces of Quayle. No one answering to his description was reported as having been seen there during the past five years, and all the advertisements in the papers remained unanswered. Deciding that they had exhausted the possibilities at Melbourne, the Captain proposed Sydney as the next likely city where Quayle might be living. The Jarvises were glad of the chance to move on, as

Sheila left them pretty much to themselves, and Melbourne was beginning to bore them.

After making things ship-shape on the morning of the *Sheila's* arrival in Sydney, the Captain went ashore to begin at once the same routine of searching which he had carried out in Melbourne. For the first three weeks he was to advertise in all the newspapers of Sydney and in those of the outlying towns, and await results. If at the end of three weeks the advertisements drew no reply, the Captain's next move would be through the private detective agencies.

Early the next morning after the *Sheila's* arrival King put off in the launch, passing directly under the stern of the yacht, and headed for the wharf. The police felt sure that the mouse had at last emerged. Doubtless he had accomplices among the crew of the yacht. The rich American heiress, the famous Miss Cutts, of course would know nothing of what a particular employee did behind her back. But surely two and two never fitted together so beautifully to make five: an eccentric American recluse and an all-American crew of unknown character were planted within a hundred yards of one another in the spacious harbor. With high expectations of some sensational two-headed chick bursting through the shell of their addled plot, the detectives unobtrusively loafed about King's landing place.

His faithful tramp had not yet finished his usual fifteen hours' sleep. King ran his eyes over the knot of idlers for a likely messenger. The trap was perfect. The mouse stuck his head into it because there was

no alternative. Each of the half dozen frowsy idlers was a picked man of the Sydney police. Beckoning the shabbiest toward him, King asked the shambling specimen whether he would care to earn the price of a drunk—not a drink, but a man-sized drunk. With many unclean oaths the sodden-looking wretch protested his complete devotion to the cause of obliging "hon'ble gen'leman."

"Then go uptown and buy me four pounds of the best butter. Here's the money. If you spend this on whiskey or beer you're a fool. There's not enough to turn the head of a sixteen-year old flapper. Fetch me the butter and I'll give you money enough to drink yourself into delirium tremens. Be back in half an hour or you won't find me here."

The detective could have cursed. Butter! To play his part he must buy that butter and deliver it in half an hour. He ambled off, feeling like the fool he was, to do his duty. Presently another of the loafers scratched himself, stretched his arms, yawned, and shuffled off down the wharf. He was careful not to overtake the seeker after butter until he was out of King's sight.

"The boss says not to buy the butter," he announced. "Spend the money and get drunk." He grinned at his intelligent colleague.

"I see. What will King do when I don't show up again?"

The detectives remaining on the wharf soon learned. Watch in hand King stood gazing over the harbor toward the hulk. The second the half hour was up he re-

stored the watch to his vest pocket, stepped aboard the launch, and made off for the hulk as fast as gas could take him.

"There's something more than a butter famine aboard that hulk," the head detective sagely remarked. "We've got to find out what it is. He will be back for butter again this afternoon or tomorrow morning. When he comes you men get into a drunken row with him. Knock him out. I'll see that he's taken to the hospital. Then we can rummage through his rotten old tub before he's out from under the ether."

King got on without butter for two days. The trap was in perfect working order when he stepped onto the wharf. It was never sprung. Instead of despatching a messenger to do his errands he himself strode off up the pier with a bundle done up in sacking under his arm. He seemed to know that he was being shadowed, for he glanced back at the tramp shuffling after him and broke into a sarcastic laugh.

Butter was not his errand, for he passed one dairy shop after another without as much as turning his head. To his great satisfaction the detective saw King making a bee-line for Blaisdell's Bank. They had caught him at last! The detective dived into a shop, and without permission used the telephone. King, he reported, was on his way at this instant to sell the gold looted in the Kimberly hold-up. In the pardonable enthusiasm of the moment the detective did not bother reasoning out how King had smuggled the gold aboard the hulk under the sleepless eyes of the police. He had done it, and now the police would

do their little bit. With the rapt expression of a confirmed mystic contemplating the necessity of the impossible, he blurted all he thought he knew over the wire.

The manager of the bank learned by telephone that King was coming. If he bought any gold dust from King he was to accompany the suspect to the front door of the bank after the business was transacted. If on the other hand King offered no gold for sale, he was to leave the bank without the manager's farewell blessing.

Within fifteen minutes after entering the bank, King emerged. The shabby tramp lounging at the door glanced up and saw the manager. In a flash he had snapped the handcuffs on King's wrists. It was neatly done, quite in the best manner.

"Come quietly," he ordered, "or I'll give the bracelets a twist that will make you."

King did not struggle. To have done so would have been stupid. One twist of the handcuffs could bring him to his knees as helpless as a woman.

"What does this mean?"

"You are under arrest for receiving and selling gold dust from numerous robberies, particularly from the Kalgoorlie hold-up. The van will be here any minute. How much did you buy, Mr. Williams?"

"Only ten pounds this time. It was done up like the last in a crude bag of kangaroo skin—evidently of native work."

King started to speak. The detective cut him short with the usual formula.

"Anything you say will be used as evidence against you."

"I know. And I'll say this. Electrical experiments on a big scale are my hobby. Have you brains enough to know what that means?"

The detective gave the handcuffs a slight twist. He remembered his futile onslaught on the innocent beets. King winced, but kept on talking.

"To finance my hobby I need money. That is why I sold Mr. Williams another ten pounds of the gold I mined out back. There is a lot more of it aboard the hulk. But," he added with a malicious smile, "you blockheads won't find it."

Restraining his natural impulse to put on the screw, the detective merely did his duty and asked King if he had anything more to say.

"Just this," King replied. "Call up the harbor master and tell him to order that yacht, the *Sheila* of New York, anchored near my outfit, to get out of my way. I left one of my experiments going full blast when I came ashore. There is no telling when my happy home will blow up."

"You are pretty clever," the detective admitted. "But you can't bluff the police off that way. They're probably boarding your hulk right now."

"More fools they. I have given you fair warning. If you had not arrested me I should have been back in plenty of time to keep everything as safe as a church."

"Perhaps we had better do as he says," Williams suggested. "I'll get the harbor master on the wire."

"And be quick about it," King advised. "While you are at it, tell the police to keep away from my hulk. Don't make the mistake of thinking I'm as big a fool as I look. I have taken no chances. Unless the police find the right switch when they get on deck they may be electrocuted before going ten feet. I have taken all precautions to keep my own private affairs to myself. If the police or any other kind of fools get hurt while I'm away, it will be their own fault."

"Tell the electric power plant to cut off his current," the detective suggested with an irritating grin.

"I have thought of that too," King replied. "You had better keep away from my property, current or no current. Well, Mr. Williams, are you going to call up the harbor master, or are you as lacking in sense as this so-called 'officer'?"

While Williams was telephoning the police-van arrived and King was whisked off to jail.

Before being locked up King repeated his warning to the governor of the prison.

"Do you mean to say you have set a time-fuse to blow up the hulk? Is that what you are driving at?"

"I need not answer that question. I have tried my best to get it through your head that the hulk is dangerous. Get me to the wharf in ten minutes and everything will be safe. Let me go aboard and stay there till my case is called. I'll put up a heavy bond if you like. Stick a ring of battleships round me if you must, to see that I don't give you the slip. Otherwise this foolishness of you thickheaded idiots is going to cost me a fortune."

"Save your story and tell it to the judge. Do you think I'm fool enough to give you a chance to commit suicide?"

"You are fool enough for anything. I can prove, even to twelve imbeciles in the jurybox and a moron on the bench, that I had nothing to do with the Kalgoorlie hold-up. I never heard of it till this man told me why I was being arrested. Do as I say and nobody shall get hurt."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Yes."

"Lock him up!" The governor was red with rage. This insolent bounder had neither respect for his corpulent person nor regard for the traditional dignity of a court of law.

King called back over his shoulder a last, desperate appeal.

"Get the *Sheila* away and don't let your men go aboard my outfit till tomorrow morning. For God's sake use your brains if you have any!"

Acting on William's telephone message the harbor master sent a radio to the *Sheila.* To their astonishment, Sheila and her guests, just about to return to the yacht after a shopping expedition, saw the thick black smoke suddenly belch up from the funnels. The yacht slewed about and headed full speed for the open sea.

"Is the Captain drunk?" Jarvis muttered. "It isn't like him. What's all this about? I'll see if we can't get him by radio." He dashed off in search of a wireless station.

The police boat was ordered back by a faster patrol just as the eager detectives were on the point of climbing up the rope ladder which King had left dangling. It was exasperating to be cheated of the easy laurels within their reach, but orders from headquarters must be obeyed. Sulking like spoilt babies they turned back to the wharf.

King must have made some slight mistake in his calculations. It was not until a few minutes after nine that evening that the deck of the hulk lifted and let the red flames gush starward. He had timed the explosion for several hours earlier; in fact he had allowed himself only two hours on shore. To his straining ears the detonation which rocked the jail was like a pardon to a man with his foot on the first step of the gallows. Half his fortune had sunk, a twisted and unrecognizable mass of machinery, to the bottom of Sydney harbor, but he was happy. There still remained a substantial balance of notes in his safe deposit box. With that he could start anew elsewhere. He could not buy and outfit another hulk. His remaining capital would not stretch that far. But there were cheaper privacies to be purchased, any one of which would serve his purpose. Within a year he could sever the main artery of this civilization he despised and let it bleed itself to death.

CHAPTER XV

RECOGNITION

All of Jarvis' legal instincts flared up over the sensational case which had set Australia talking. For three days the newspapers hashed and rehashed the story of the taciturn King and his queer doings in Sydney harbor. Opinion as to his guilt was not quite unanimous. The majority accepted the theory of the police that King was at the bottom of the Kalgoorlie robbery. A small minority, however, made up of Jarvis and a score of old miners, sniffed at the story in the hope of discovering the large rat beneath all this litter of circumstantial evidence.

Williams had told all he knew to the papers. Would a guilty man brazenly walk into one of the strongest banks in Sydney, sell a suspiciously large quantity of gold dust, contemptuously invite the scrutiny of the police and last, gratuitously insult the manager of the bank? "I hate bankers." Was that the unprovoked retort of a man conscious of his own guilt? To Jarvis it sounded more like a challenge, a slap in the face, inviting Williams to investigate in the most malicious and searching way possible. But what could have been King's motive in courting the attention of the police? Jarvis thought he saw through the smoke

screen. King, he reasoned, wished to distract the police from his real secret by offering them a fake to investigate. He had come by his gold honestly. There Jarvis agreed with the miners, who suspected King of having discovered new goldfields which, naturally enough, he wished to keep to himself.

But there also Jarvis parted company with the miners. The latter saw in King's eccentric life in the hulk nothing more than the crotchety extravagance of a man who must have lived much away from whites and who, having become rich, did not know how to get the most out of his money. He probably was a crank indulging an amateur's half-baked interest in popular science. To Jarvis' mind this simpler theory was just a shade too simple. King's real business, whatever it was, had been aboard the hulk. And it was of so secret and so valuable a nature that he had left nothing to chance. The explosion which wrecked the hulk and sent it to the bottom was not, as King now stoutly maintained, an accident precipitated by the interference of the police. Their mere interruption of a dangerous experiment in high tension electric currents had not caused the explosion which rocked Sydney. No, King himself had deliberately planned the wreckage of all his machinery before he went ashore. He had left nothing to chance. If he failed to return in time to arrest the threatened destruction of his plant, it would be wrecked and sunk before a spy could learn what was afoot. Obviously if King was willing to go to such extremes to protect his secret it must be of unique value. Jarvis decided to investigate.

Having introduced himself to the governor of the jail he asked if he might see King.

"This bank-manager, Williams, gives it as his opinion that King is an American. As a lawyer and a fellow American I may be able to do something for him. The preliminary hearing is set for tomorrow at ten, is it not?"

The governor of the prison nodded. He made no objection. King consented to see Jarvis. The interview, thanks to the impression made on the governor by the casual mention of Cutts' name, was private.

Jarvis opened his attack with the assurance that he had come merely as a lawyer and an American to offer his services to a fellow countryman in distress. If King was suspicious he did not give himself away.

"Do you live in Sydney?" he asked.

"No. I am here only for a week or two. My wife and I are making a tour of the Australian ports as guests of Miss Cutts, the banker's daughter. You noticed her yacht, the *Sheila,* anchored near your hulk?"

"Yes. Miss Cutts must be wealthy."

"Her father is the great international banker, now president of the All American Chemical Products Corporation."

"Never heard of him."

"That's strange. I thought every American knew who Cutts was. He is one of the outstanding figures in the United States, and in Europe too, for that matter. How long have you been away from the United States?"

"Twenty years."

"You must have left when you were a mere boy."

"More or less. I'm older than I look."

"You have followed mining?"

"Off and on."

There was an awkward silence. King evidently was not inclined to be communicative.

"You will need legal advice," Jarvis resumed. "Will you let me help you?"

"I suppose you mean about this robbery? Thank you, I need no advice."

"The charge is pretty serious, and the police seem confident of holding you for trial. Public opinion is against you, and that means a lot. Hadn't you better reconsider?"

"No. I had nothing to do with the Kimberley hold-up, or with any other."

"I don't doubt it. In fact that is why I came to offer my help. But all that will have to be proved."

"Exactly. I can prove my innocence in two minutes."

Jarvis looked incredulous. "You seem pretty sure of yourself. Do you mind telling me what makes you so confident?"

"I don't care to say until the trial. But you can help me on another matter."

"Anything you say, Mr. King."

"Then bring suit in my name against the City of Sydney for two hundred thousand dollars' damages. If I win the suit you take half."

"We can talk later of my fee. As a matter of fact,

I don't want a cent of your money. On what grounds will you sue the City?"

"False imprisonment, defamation of character, or slander, or whatever the legal phrase is. You know what I mean. Also for destroying my property. If it hadn't been for their idiotic police my plant would not have blown up. Will you handle my suit?"

"Gladly. But I can do so only as an advisor. The actual pleading in court will have to be done by a local lawyer, as I am not a member of the Australian Bar. I could make better progress," he added, after a pause, "if you would give me your full confidence."

"For several reasons I don't care to tell you everything just yet. Still, as you have consented to take my case, I shall tell you where I got my gold. You might not relish working for a criminal, so I shall first establish my respectability." He favored the lawyer with a sarcastic, bitter smile. "If you think it advisable to stop the wild yarns which are going round you can give my story to the papers."

"I shall do so this afternoon. If Australia is anything like the United States a strong public opinion in your favor will go a long way with the jury."

"My case tomorrow will not go to a jury. Now, about that gold. I was shipwrecked on the coast of this continent."

"How long ago?"

"That is immaterial. The spot where I found myself stranded is far beyond white influence. I was the only civilized man within a wide radius. The blacks knew nothing of the white man's ways. They

were a friendly lot, and I soon became a sort of captain over the tribe. They squat on one of the richest undiscovered goldfields in the world."

"Of course you cannot be more definite in your description. It is only natural that you should wish to keep the location of your find a secret."

"Is it? Then I must be different from the common run of miners. So far as the gold is concerned I don't care in the least who knows where I got my dust."

"You found gems too? Or platinum?"

"Neither. My reasons for keeping the location of that goldfield to myself are my own. However, to go on with my story: I taught the blacks how to wash gold. We made the necessary pans out of clay, baked and glazed in wood fires. With my pocket-knife as a needle and strips of kangaroo hide as thread, the women learned to sew after a fashion. They made bags for the dust. When the men had washed out what I estimated at a thousand pounds of gold dust, the women packed it in the kangaroo skin bags, and the whole tribe migrated under my orders, in search of a white squatters' settlement. Without their expert help I should never have reached civilization. Where I saw only a wilderness of stunted scrub and stones, they saw food and water. I shall not tell you how long that journey took. Neither you nor any other white man will get the slightest clue from me as to the location of that goldfield.

"Our journey together ended at the first signs of white men. I ordered the blacks to bury the gold and sent them back to their own country. I was the one

white man they had ever seen, and the only one they shall ever see, if I can help it.

"When they were well out of the way, I went on to the farm which I had sighted from a distant hill. Saying that I was a laborer looking for work I asked the farmer—a sheep raiser—to take me on. At the time I was practically naked. Men were scarce in that part of the country, so the farmer gave me a job.

"The nearest village was over thirty miles from the farm. Knowing nothing about sheep, I got the job of taking the wool to market. That was just what I wanted. Before making a trip I spent the night in running to my cache, digging up two bags of gold dust, walking back, hiding the bags under the wool in the wagon, and getting an hour's sleep. In my prospecting I had grown hardened to long forced marches on little sleep.

"Long before the season's wool was transported to the village I had all my gold safely buried within a mile of the first galvanized iron shack. Not to leave the farmer in the lurch I finished the hauling job before drawing my wages. Then I walked to the village, rented a shanty, bought some old packing cases, nailed up my bags in lots of five each and shipped them as 'mineralogical specimens' addressed to myself in a certain town. They were to be stored until called for at the freight office."

"Did you ship by rail or steamer?"

"I find it convenient to forget. After claiming the cases at the freight office I took out a good double handful of gold dust and sold it for half its value to

a barkeeper. With the money I bought transportation for myself and the gold to Sydney. On arriving here I sold some more dust in the same way as before, and put up half of the money as deposit on a rented dray. Then I drove out of the city and at night buried my gold in a vacant lot not fifty yards from the highway.

"After returning the dray to the stables I thought it best to lose my identity. The gold was safe. For nearly a month I lodged at the Salvation Army Refuge before going to Blaisdell's Bank. The rest of my story is in the papers. The gold was exactly as I had left it, except that moles, or some other small ground animals, had burrowed all around the bags."

"You don't care to tell any more?" Jarvis inquired.

"Not now. Some day I may have a lot more to say."

"Just as you like. Even what you have told me will make a good impression on the newspaper public. Are you sure there is nothing else I can do for you before the preliminary hearing tomorrow morning?"

"If it is not too much trouble you might find me a competent assayer and two or three practical mining engineers. Get men connected with the government if you can. There must be a Bureau of Mines or something of the sort here. If you can have the men in court when my case comes up it will save time."

Jarvis shook hands with the reticent prisoner and took his leave. It was not what the man said or did that impressed him. It was the unexpressed but obvious hatred of his fellow men and all their works that left the strongest memory and, incidentally, a bad

taste. Jarvis frankly disliked the man. King's repressed fury against the whites was none the less evident because of its repression. What had civilization done to this caged beast that he should hate it so viciously? Was he an anarchist? If so it was a good thing that the police had scotched him and indirectly exploded his arsenal before he blew Sydney off the map.

Late that afternoon the papers printed record-breaking editions. A gold rush would have started immediately had the frenzied miners, barbers, waiters, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, jackaroos, and others known in what direction to run. To save his sanity Jarvis beat an ignominious retreat to the seclusion of the yacht. Nobody on shore believed him when he reiterated that King had given no clue to the location of the mysterious goldfield. In the greed-inflamed eyes of the populace Jarvis was a lawyer and therefore a liar.

All was calm aboard the yacht. Mrs. Jarvis was sewing in the saloon. Sheila, Mrs. Jarvis informed her husband, was resting with a headache in her cabin. As a matter of fact Sheila had just finished reading Burdette's latest monthly report. Since joining young Barton at the Long Island estate, the doctor wrote, Cutts' health had greatly improved. Barton and the banker were absorbed in the construction of an aquarium—Cutts' hobby for the moment, to be donated later to the public. Young Barton, Sheila would recall, was the chemical genius whose masterly direction of the All American had raised him to the very top

of the financial world in less than two years. She also would remember, the doctor wrote, that this chemist Barton, who had been associated with Cutts since the latter returned from Singapore, was the same Barton who had been David's closest friend at the University. He was therefore almost a member of the Cutts family, socially as well as financially.

Sheila reflected that of course she knew all this about Barton. Why was Burdette so insistent in stating a lot of irrelevant details? Her father's health being the ostensible subject of the letter, what point was there in digressing at such length on Barton? She read on. Although they quarreled frequently, Burdette continued in his report, the banker and the young chemist were almost inseparable. The older man seemed to have found a real companion in this brusque, vigorous friend of Quayle's. Burdette thought that Sheila might safely return at the end of the year, provided she then felt that her Australian trip had yielded all that it might reasonably be expected to give.

Sheila tried to feel glad that she might soon see her father again, for she was beginning to lose hope of ever finding David. But she could not. She had given up lying to herself that morning when her father's tongue betrayed him, and the accusing flowers slipped from her unfeeling arm.

She followed Burdette's letter slowly through once more, trying to read between the lines. What was the doctor striving to tell her? He suspected something, but what, he meticulously avoided saying. The bald

sentences were clear and unambiguous. Yet the letter as a whole had a sinister double meaning. What was the terrible accusation which he refrained so carefully from stating in black and white? *"Barton and your father often quarrel, sometimes with great bitterness. But, all things considered, I think David's friend is just the right medicine for your father."*

The hideous suspicion which had fed upon her secret mind for months leapt to birth. The murder was out. Her father had done away with David to rob him. The dead cannot fight for their rights. They have none. "Barton and your father often quarrel, sometimes with great bitterness." They were wrangling over the division of her dead lover's genius. Her father had deliberately lied to Burdette that "David might be alive" in order to get her off and out of the way. Sheila knew it as positively as if she had heard it from the lips of two thieves. This at last was the truth which Burdette had disguised in his sophisticated account of her father's confession. No wonder he had hesitated to show her the naked fact. But was this foul thing the whole of it? What else, if anything, lay between David and her father while the former still lived?

She clenched her fists. For one mad moment she looked wildly round the cabin for some clean, quick means of destroying herself. There was nothing. She could not have brought herself to use the bedding or a broken drinking glass.

Oh, the utter shame of it, to be the daughter of a self-righteous liar! His whole life had been a pious,

canting lie, and he was her father. She might have forgiven him murder; it is at least a man's crime. But his bedizened charity, his windy platitudes and his public prayers for the welfare of humanity she could never forgive. Why had not her father been an honest, two-fisted blackguard like Barton? Then she might have respected him. She had known Barton for the sensualist he was the first and only time she ever saw him. But her father had been about her since she was a baby, a mean, intensely moral man with the soul of a worm.

At dinner that evening she was perfectly calm. Neither of her guests noted more than a becoming pallor and a disposition to let the Captain keep the small talk alive. She was wondering how quickly she could reach Los Angeles to see Burdette. Burdette was cold and practical as steel. She would wait for his advice before settling the long account with her father.

After dinner Sheila accompanied the Captain and her guests to the upper deck, where they sat talking and watching the twinkling constellations of the city lights. She took but little part in the conversation, and her friends, feeling her abstraction, considerately let her alone. The sudden recognition of her father's true character was less of a shock than she could have believed. That the new estimate of him was just she had not the slightest doubt. Innumerable trifling changes in his relations toward her since her return from Singapore, and in his own lifelong habits, inconsequential and disjointed in themselves, fitted to-

gether inevitably into a complete and silent confession of guilt. Not for nothing had father and daughter shared one another's intimate thoughts since she first learned to lisp. And ever since she came back from Singapore her subconscious mind had been preparing her for the silent knowledge which sooner or later must insist upon being heard. She was hardly even shocked now that the final barriers gave way.

Could they have heard the questions she was now silently asking herself, her friends would have been petrified where they sat. "Has Burdette found out the whole truth at last? Did David ever come to Australia as the doctor supposed? *If not, whom did my father hire to kill David? Is the man still alive? What has become of Hansen? Why did my father never mention his name after he returned? Is all this searching in Australia just another of my father's lies, passed on to keep me busy while he and Barton fight for the possession of David's invention?"*

Hansen was the brandy-soaked captain of her father's yacht on the fatal trip. Sheila would ask Burdette how to go about finding this man without exciting her father's suspicions.

Suddenly her attention was arrested by something that Jarvis had said.

"The preliminary hearing is set for tomorrow morning at ten. It really is one of the most unusual cases in all my legal experience. I thought seeing the man would give you a little mild excitement, so I made arrangements with the bailiff to let you two into the courtroom half an hour before the doors are opened

to the public. The place will be jammed. Want to go with Minnie, Sheila?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Jarvis, I'm afraid I wasn't listening. What is this case?"

He drew his deck chair over next to hers and repeated the story of his day's adventures. Sheila was strangely still.

"For some reason that I can't figure out," Jarvis concluded, "this man King has a furious hatred for everything civilized. It isn't so much what he says as it is his whole manner. Then there is that unwarranted insult when Williams, the bank-manager, was only trying to be decent, 'I hate bankers.' What do you make of it, Sheila?"

She did not answer. Jarvis peered into her face. While he was talking she had reclined far back in her chair, resting her head on a pillow.

"Minnie!" he cried to his wife, "Sheila's ill."

She had fainted, but revived almost immediately when they laid her flat on the deck and put a cushion under her feet.

"How foolish," she murmured. "I can't imagine what made me do a thing like that. It's the first time in my life anything of the sort happened. No, really, I'm quite well. Please don't send for a doctor," she begged.

"Hadn't you better lie down in your cabin?" Mrs. Jarvis suggested. "You haven't been well all day."

"It's so stuffy inside tonight. I'll just lie in one of the long chairs and listen to you people, if you don't mind."

They made her comfortable and pretended that nothing unusual had happened. As the Captain leaned over to adjust a cushion, she caught his hand, unobserved by the Jarvises, and crushed it between her own. He understood. Returning the pressure he quietly stood between her and Jarvis so that the narrator might not see her while he talked.

"What sort of a man is King?" Sheila asked. "I mean what does he look like? Young or middle aged, tall or short—you know."

Jarvis gave a minute description of the suspect.

"Of course the full beard hides his face, but I should say he's somewhere between twenty-five and thirty. In some ways he is older than I am. Then again at times he acts just like an obstinate kid. His cocksureness that he can handle his own defense without legal advice is exactly like a conceited college boy showing off. Well, before the court finishes with him he may find out that he has more use for counsel than he thought."

"I'm just dying to see him," Sheila confessed, in the vivacious manner of a bored society bud seeking a new thrill. "You can count on me for your party."

Long after the Jarvises had retired, Sheila stole from her cabin and tapped on the door of the chart-room, confident that the Captain would be waiting up for her.

"It is David," she whispered when she had noiselessly closed the door.

"Are you sure?" he asked doubtfully. "Think of what it will mean if you are mistaken."

"I have thought. Please don't ask me how I know. I am right."

"If Jarvis told it straight," the Captain said slowly, "David is in serious trouble."

"He has done nothing wrong!"

"So he said to Jarvis. But suppose he can't prove his innocence?"

"Then we must get him away from here somehow —anyhow."

"Break the jail? It can't be done, Sheila."

"You must find a way!"

"Why cross our bridges before we come to them? Jarvis said this man you think is David seemed cocksure of himself. Crooks are usually willing enough to hire a lawyer. This man didn't want one. I agree with Jarvis. The man knows he can prove he is not guilty."

She stood tense and silent, nervously biting her lips. Certain unpleasant details of the story Burdette had told her began to assume a disquieting significance.

"Suppose David cannot prove his innocence?" she whispered.

The Captain looked troubled. The one possible means of delivery in the unhappy event which Sheila suggested, appeared to the honest sailor as being unlikely to succeed in the Australian Commonwealth, although it might easily prove a triumphant success in Russia or France.

"We might bribe somebody," he suggested shamefacedly.

Sheila shook her head.

"David is innocent. Whatever he has done may seem black, but I know it is white. If we can do nothing to free him ourselves I shall cable to my father to come here at once. His reputation as a business man should help us to get justice." She paused for a moment to choose her words carefully. "I feel sure he will be able to think of a way out if we can't," she added slowly. "Are you going to the trial, or the hearing, or whatever it is, tomorrow morning?"

"Do you wish me to go?"

"I would rather have you do what you can to find out all about David's life here. King is the name Mr. Jarvis said, isn't it?"

"Very well," the Captain agreed. "It should be easy. I shall go to the Sydney branch of Elderton's."

"They couldn't help us in Melbourne," Sheila objected.

"There was nothing to be found there. Elderton's is the best private detective agency in the world. I thought they were very efficient in Melbourne."

"I know," she admitted. "Well, do what you think best." She hesitated. "I must find some way of cutting loose from the Jarvises after we settle this. No one must ever know that we found David here, or that I was looking for him. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course. Now, Sheila, don't expect too much from this man of Jarvis'. He may not be David. Better not hope till you see him."

"I won't," she promised, slipping noiselessly from

the chartroom, "because I know it is David! To expect too much would be impossible."

She spent the night hoping, dreaming, fearing, dreading, planning. How should she let her father know? Directly, or through Burdette? As she thought of the author of all her misery she felt neither anger nor resentment, but only pity. The miracle of life was transforming her, softening her. David was not dead, not murdered; that fact shone out as the one thing which mattered in the whole universe. Remembering the doctor's injunction to look at her father through the dispassionate eyes of medical science, she almost forgave him his robbery. In time even that would dwindle down the distance of trivial, forgotten things. Her lover lived; that alone was important. That she had misjudged her father on one count did not qualify her verdict on the lesser crime. The flash of insight which had followed on reading Burdette's report was too vital to be false. Her father had robbed David, but what of it? She dozed off in a fitful slumber, scarcely daring to pray for the dawn.

She rose early and spent longer than usual on her toilet. Like all modern girls she used a touch of color when necessary. This morning the ivory pallor of her cheeks called out for more than a touch, and her lips too asked for aid. Rather pathetically she wished not only to conceal her telltale emotions from her guests, but also to look her best. She little suspected what reception was in store for her efforts.

When she joined the party in the saloon for breakfast the Jarvises complimented her on the fine re-

covery she had made, and indeed her face was as softly beautiful as a wild rose. She had done an artistic and yet a natural job.

Thanks to the bailiff, the members of the party were seated in the front row half an hour before the crowd was admitted to the courtroom. Jarvis left them to see that the assayer and the three mining engineers, whom he had engaged at King's request the previous afternoon, would be in court promptly at ten. Sheila's eyes watched the clock.

At five minutes to ten the doors were thrown open and there was a wild scramble for seats or standing room. In two minutes the courtroom was jammed, and the disappointed mob outside hung on in the vain hope of overhearing some scrap of the proceedings. At two minutes to ten Jarvis entered from the judge's chambers with his experts. The assayer and the mining engineers had invited two friends from the Mint, a chemist and a metallurgist, to sit with them and, if necessary, give advice. None of the six experts knew what would be asked of them, as King had given Jarvis no hint of his intended defense. At ten o'clock sharp the judge took his seat upon the bench and the prisoner was led into the dock.

Although he was changed profoundly, unalterably, Sheila recognized him instantly. The full beard which hid his face, and his altered gait were obvious. These made little difference in his sweetheart's eyes. Her heart pounded furiously against her ribs, but she kept a level head. This was not the David she had known, but an embittered, cynical man, physically in the full

flower of health and vigor, but infinitely old and sick of soul. The indifferent glance which he cast over the crowded courtroom showed neither curiosity nor resentment. It was the cold, absent stare of one who is about to destroy vermin. His interest in their probable sensation was *nil;* only the most efficient method of getting the unpleasant, necessary job done occupied his mind.

Though the blood froze in her veins her love leaped up like a hungry flame, eager to devour her fear of him. Never in the past had she loved him like this; not till this instant had she known the full meaning of love. Would he see her? His eyes roved over the spectators in the front row, met hers, rested on them an instant, and passed on. There had been recognition, nothing more, in that stony glance. He turned and addressed the judge.

"Your Honor," he began, "I am conducting my own defense. You will pardon my complete ignorance of court procedure. I am suspected of complicity in the robbery of gold from the Kalgoorlie fields. My legal advisor, Mr. Jarvis, tells me that this is a preliminary hearing to decide whether or not I am to be held for trial. Is that right?"

"It is," the judge concurred.

"Is that kangaroo skin bag the last I sold to Blaisdell's Bank?"

"Yes. It, and the gold in it, are part of the evidence against you."

"Mr. Jarvis," the accused continued, "have you brought your experts?"

Jarvis named the six men with him and briefly stated their qualifications.

"Will you have them sworn in, your Honor?" King requested.

The judge had the oath administered to each of the six in turn. All were well known to him, both personally and by professional reputation. They were probably the six best men in Australia in their respective specialties.

"Examine the gold in that bag," King directed.

The two men from the Mint untied the kangaroo skin bag and spread out about a teaspoonful of the gold on a sheet of white paper. The examination lasted less than half a minute. There was a brief consultation and the spokesman, one of the Mint officials, addressed the court.

"This is not Kalgoorlie gold, your Honor."

"You all concur in that opinion?" the judge asked.

The six experts signified their assent. "It is obvious at a glance," the spokesman continued. "There can not be the slightest doubt. Neither the color nor the texture is that of gold from the Kalgoorlie district."

"Where, in your opinion, was this gold mined?"

"Personally I should say it is from some new, undiscovered goldfield. It might possibly be an allotropic form of one of the several kinds of Australian gold already known. It certainly was not mined at any of the fields now in recognized operation."

"It is not Kalgoorlie gold?"

"No, your Honor."

"The case is dismissed."

The tense crowd broke into a cheer. Australia had added another goldfield to her already great riches! But where was it? One square look at King's face told them that they would never learn from him.

King passed out of the dock and walked directly in front of Sheila's party to make his exit by the side door. He did not so much as turn his head as he passed her. So far as he was concerned she might have been air. She had gone out of his conscious life when he ground her miniature into the sands of the desolate beach where he had been left by her father to die of thirst.

A reporter intercepted him before he reached the exit.

"Won't you give me a statement for the *Bulletin*, Mr. King?"

"With pleasure." The retort was a snarl. "Tell all these human swine that neither they nor anyone on earth shall ever find out from me where that goldfield is."

"Why not?" the reporter asked, ignoring the offensive word and the harsh tone of King's answer.

"Because the people who live on it gave me water when I was thirsty."

"Your mines are in a desert part of the country, then?"

"I am answering no questions."

"Is that all you care to say?"

"No, but this is. The people squatting on that

goldfield shall never be contaminated by the wet rot of civilization."

"Whiskey is bad for the natives," the diplomatic reporter agreed, thinking to draw his prey out farther. "Still, our government could make the possession of spirits a felony in the new fields. I am sure you will find Australia eager to grant any reasonable concession for the opportunity to develop your fields. Prohibition, I hear, is a great success in America."

"Prohibition be damned!"

The crowd cheered. The sombre tragedy was fast becoming a rollicking farce. King kept on, lashing himself into a white fury.

"The natives might drink themselves into delirium tremens for all the harm it would do them. But the festering ethics, the puling, sickly charity of your so-called civilization would damn them forever."

He tore himself away and plunged for the exit.

"Start that suit against the City tomorrow," he shouted back at Jarvis. "I will meet you here at ten o'clock."

Sheila slipped away, leaving the Jarvises to find their way back alone to the launch. She saw clearly that David had judged her equally guilty with her father. Well, her duty lay with David, not with the man who had betrayed her lover and driven his once sweet soul down to dregs and bitterness. Deliberately she made her choice. Though David might despise her because she was her father's daughter, she would fight on his side. And the first blow to the iniquitous thieves on the other side of the globe should come

from her. Walking firmly into a cable office she despatched this message to Burdette:

"Tell my father David is living in Sydney as David King.

Sheila Cutts."

It was well meant, and it was her declaration of loyalty, if not of war. Nevertheless it proved to be an all but irreparable blunder in tactics.

The honest Captain, in the meantime, was doing his bit. Like Sheila, the Captain's efforts in behalf of justice also were destined to rebound. Elderton's International Detective Agency agreed not only to rake up "King's" past in Sydney, but also to keep him under the strictest surveillance by their best men twenty-four hours a day. These detectives were of a different calibre from those of the Sydney police. King was really watched this time.

CHAPTER XVI

BLACK'S MOVE

SHEILA'S cablegram was like the finishing touch to a singularly adroit and beautiful problem in chess. Instead however of the customary "White to play and mate in three moves," the initiative was Black's and checkmate must follow in a single move. Without the whole board before her Sheila could not see exactly how urgent was the problem which she had set by cabling Burdette. The most she had intended was a curt admonition to the malefactors to desist from their evil practices before their victim should return in person to settle accounts. What she actually accomplished was of an entirely different order.

Barely twenty-four hours after the telegraph key stopped clicking off Sheila's message in Sydney, Quayle's invention passed from the small, petty sphere of individual greed, personal animosities and private spites, into the larger and more aristocratic regions of world diplomacy and international cowardice. At one bound it leapt from the domestic arena, shot clear over the national, and became a world-wide issue of the gravest concern.

Ambassadors were not recalled on account of Sheila's cablegram, nor were hot-headed ukases to

mobilize the armies and navies of the world headlined in the polyglot press. Quayle's invention was not even mentioned on the floor of the House, nor in the President's Cabinet, nor was it alluded to in Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, or the Reichstag. In fact no government official in any civilized country took the slightest public notice of Quayle or of his invention. Nevertheless the invention, on account of Sheila's cablegram, engaged the efficient attention of the highest officials in many lands less than a day after the message reached America. What was done was perfected swiftly, crushingly, without regard to expense, in complete secrecy, and with the entire diplomatic machinery of more than one powerful government aligned and working at top speed to complete in record time a masterpiece of high politics.

The whole truth, of course, is not likely ever to be revealed, for it is only when some exasperated nation runs amuck and flings the evil records of its secret diplomacy into the market place for the world at large to gape at morbidly and pityingly, that the causes of criminal bloodshed become clear. The possibility of a wholesale international cellar-cleaning being remote, the historian will have to content himself with a bare record of what actually transpired on the surface of things when the menace of Quayle's invention became evident, leaving details to the highly-placed political doctors of the time, who alone know what measures they urged and what means they discussed to make those measures practicable.

This much theorizing may be permitted: not one

man in a hundred million could have suggested a solution of the desperate problem essentially different from that which the statesmen reached and put into action. As the late President Cleveland remarked on a similar occasion, the world was confronted, not by a theory, but by a condition. Facts cannot be dissipated by theories. Quayle's invention was a fact: the security of civilization was another. To preserve both was impossible. Therefore one or other of the incompatibles must be eliminated. In sound accordance with this logic of world democracy, the only possible solution was speedily reached and put into play. Secrecy was the watchword, the preservation of civilization the slogan. With such an end in view, no means of attaining it could reasonably be called unjustifiable, and such indeed was Quayle's own verdict eventually, when all the evidence lay before him.

On receiving Sheila's telegram when he arrived at his office for the day's work, Burdette immediately wrote out a telegram to James, the valet-nurse, asking him to break the news to Cutts; and, after having done so, to keep a strict watch on the patient. The doctor then filed away the cablegram with the records of the case and went on with his work.

"That telegram," he remarked to himself, "may be Cutts' death warrant. If so, it is a merciful solution." It would dispose of Miss Cutts' case, he thought, and in a moment had dismissed the entire matter from his mind. Developments, he anticipated, would not follow rapidly so far as the banker was

concerned. But the doctor was a busy man, and he had little time to waste in hastening the future or in idle guesses.

At his end of the wire James, without knowing precisely what he was doing, boldly seized the lion by the tail. As Burdette naturally had not told either of the nurses any details of Cutts' confession, the message which James was requested to transmit at once to the banker seemed innocent enough.

"Tell my father David is living in Sydney as David King.

"Sheila Cutts."

For all James knew this was merely the record of some domestic matter having nothing to do with the patient's illness.

When the telegraph operator telephoned the message to the Cutts summer home on Long Island, James received it as a matter of routine. The patient was sleeping quietly. James glanced at him, hesitating whether to break the sick man's slumber or to disobey the strict letter of Burdette's order and let Cutts have his rest out. Finally, with a sigh of regret he decided to obey the doctor's order. The banker was always irritable when his sleep was disturbed, so James looked forward to the outcome of his obedience with no great pleasure.

Cutts awoke instantly and fully at James' light touch on his shoulder.

"What is it?" he demanded fearfully.

"Doctor Burdette telegraphed me to deliver a cable message from your daughter at once."

All the blood left the sleep-flushed face, and Cutts sank back on his pillow.

"Has she found him?" he groaned.

James repeated Sheila's message.

Cutts made no sound, but lay like a corpse, white and motionless, as if he had suffered a paralytic stroke. In alarm the nurse bent over him.

"Are you ill?"

"No," the stricken man whispered, "only done. This is the end."

James poured out a stiff dram of brandy and forced it between the purple lips.

"Leave me alone," the defeated wretch moaned, turning his face to the wall.

As the stimulant began to work the banker regained control of his shattered faculties.

"Call Barton," he whispered.

The nurse looked doubtful. Should he leave the patient in this serious condition, even for a few moments?

"You needn't be afraid," Cutts assured him in a husky voice. "I am done, but this is not the last. Call Barton or take me to him."

James decided to accede to the patient's request. With a final glance around the room to see that nothing with a sharp edge lay within reach, he unobtrusively restored the bottle and the medicine glass to the cabinet, locked it, and went to rouse Barton. To his surprise he found the chemist awake and fully

dressed, poring over a sheet of chemical calculations. He had been up all night, working like a fiend, for the aquarium was now rapidly approaching completion.

"What's up?" he demanded in reply to James' summons. "Is he about to pass out?"

"He is quite ill, sir. Will you please come at once?"

"Sure. I wouldn't miss his last words for a million dollars."

Approaching his collaborator's bedside Barton almost got a shock. In spite of himself the tragic despair of that white face, whiter in its waxy pallor than the pillow framing it, all but touched his heart. Had Cutts died then, Barton might have pitied him.

"Feeling pretty rocky?" he asked gently, gazing down at the pathetic wreckage of a mad ambition.

"Ask James to leave us," Cutts whispered.

"All right, boss. James, get out. I'll take care of Mr. Cutts for a spell."

As his orders from Burdette had recently permitted him to be less persistent in his watch when Barton alone was "conferring" with the patient, James silently left the room and took up his station in the hallway to be ready for possible emergencies.

"Now," Barton began when they were alone, "what is it, Mr. Cutts? What has upset you like this all of a sudden?"

Barton habitually addressed his principal as "Mr.," even when they were alone. It was not irony, merely habit. In a single short sentence Cutts told it all.

"Sheila cables that David is living in Sydney as David King."

Barton assimilated this thunderbolt without turning a hair. His ruddy complexion did not blanch the fraction of a shade. If his pulse lost a beat no physician could have detected it.

"Where's the message?"

"James took it over the telephone. Dr. Burdette sent it from Pasadena. Sheila cabled to him."

"Who's Burdette?"

"My physician. He keeps me in touch with Sheila."

"Sure it's not a fake?"

Cutts nodded weakly.

"Sheila is truthful," he muttered. "We are done."

"I'm not," Barton retorted. "Wait till I've had breakfast. Then I'll talk to you. Keep your nerve. I haven't lost mine. Look at me! What's to be gained by bellyaching at every little difficulty that comes up? Pull yourself together, and I'll get both of us out of this with flying colors. We'll win."

"What are you going to do?"

"How the devil do I know? Just now I've only got sense enough to avoid trying to think till my head clears. Well, I'm going to rout the servants out and have some breakfast. I'll tell James to bring yours here. Eat a good meal and think of the weather—anything but this."

Being practically master of the Cutts' ménage, Barton soon had the servants scurrying to get his breakfast. For the first time in his dissolute life he felt sick and dizzy. Like most sensualists he was a hearty eater, with a keen appreciation of the relative merits of good foods. The breakfast which he ordered

would have done credit to a Roman emperor training for a debauch. He seldom indulged to excess in strong coffee, regarding it as a wishy-washy sort of stimulant, fit only to be used as an ally to the usual absinthe drip of his numerous soberings-up; but this morning he ordered a full pot of the stiffest brew possible. Until it came he refused to think. His mind was as nearly blank as it is possible for the human mind to become.

The coffee settled his digestion and helped him to concentrate. Quayle had come to life. That was the overwhelming truth. The details of his friend's resurrection did not interest him. The isolated, staggering fact was enough. *Quayle had come to life!*

Until this morning Barton had fully believed that Cutts had done away with Quayle. This belief in fact had stood as the dubious cornerstone on which rested the elaborate superstructure of his bulldozing of the banker. It followed then, since his browbeating had succeeded up to the present so admirably, that Cutts was indeed morally guilty of murder, if not technically. With a passing curse on his dupe for having failed to dispose effectively of Quayle, Barton swallowed the failure as the fact which it was. Then, like a true scientist, he coolly reached for the next fact.

He could honestly say that he would have but little fear of Quayle at close quarters. Having known his brother chemist intimately during their four years together at the university, he believed that Quayle, whatever might be his present plans, still had a far deeper

understanding of chemistry than of human nature. A personal encounter with the wronged inventor therefore held no terrors for Barton, who regarded human nature as a carrion crow contemplates bad meat.

The fleeting suggestion that he and Quayle combine forces for the conquest of the world was thrust aside as visionary. Quayle had always exhibited a stubborn decency when confronted with anything fundamentally rotten. Barton, in passing, frankly admitted that he himself had no conventional ethics whatever. The possession of such decadent luxuries he looked upon as evidence of a half-sexed effeminacy. But Quayle's indurated sense of the justice of things would effectively block any treaty to use the invention as Barton firmly intended using it, namely to dominate the world with such an absolute despotism as it had not yet suffered, in order that the tyrant might riot through a life which would have made Heliogabalus blush. So, obviously, Quayle, whom his crowd at the university had nicknamed "the preacher," was out of the running as a possible team-mate for the supreme voluptuary of all history.

Being dismissed as a partner in Barton's contemplated pigs' paradise, Quayle stood out as awkwardly as a third thumb. At a single word from Quayle Barton's heaven would go glimmering. Just one incautious remark from the inventor's lips might well bring civilization tumbling down in rubbish about Barton's ears. With civilization smashed and abolished what chance would a sybarite have? None

whatever. Grass and the simple life might appeal to an esthete like Nebuchadnezzar, but not to a full-blooded intellectual like Barton.

With a shout of mirth he finished his pot of coffee and his meditations in one choking gulp. His problem had solved itself in a single, swift, penetrating thrust of Satanic genius. The solution, to Barton's wry sense of humor, appeared quite worthy of being enshrined with the subtle jest which he contemplated for M. Poyère and expectant, canny France. This latest sprite of his pure fancy aided and abetted his other imp. Together his twin jests twined about each other, two yet one, like a pair of ideal Siamese twins. Whooping with laughter he reeled from the breakfast room to find Cutts.

The banker had breakfasted—not very heartily—in bed, and was now fully dressed.

"Beat it, James," Barton ordered curtly. "Mr. Cutts will be all right. Anyway, your watch is about up. The secretary will be here at eight."

When James had discreetly withdrawn, Barton slapped his collaborator jovially on the shoulder and burst into a shout of laughter.

"You're done, are you, Mr. Cutts? Why, man, you've won! Do as I say and we shall clean up better than ever."

Cutts stared hopelessly at the effervescent chemist.

"You yourself said," he retorted bitterly, "that a third man knowing the invention could make our possession of it dangerous and worthless. Quayle can break us with a word. We are ruined."

"Too bad you didn't foresee this," Barton snapped, irritated by his dupe's lack of spine, "out there in Singapore. Why didn't you do a good job while you were about it? Then we shouldn't have had all this stew over nothing."

It was a false move on Barton's part. The contemptuous tone of his reproach instantly roused all of the banker's trickiness. With the shrewd cunning of the insane he recognized and seized his advantage.

"A good job?" he repeated. "What do you mean, Doctor Barton?"

"You know what I mean," the chemist growled with a menacing gesture. "Didn't you decoy Quayle off on that yacht trip to put him out of the way?"

Cutts looked shocked. Perhaps he was. Now that he knew Quayle was not dead, it may have appeared to his distorted vision that he never intended murder on his trip to Westralia. At any rate the turn of events had at last given him the upper hand of Barton, for the moment at least.

"I recall," he replied with all the feeble force of his shabby dignity, "that it was you, Doctor Barton, who tried to tempt me into a heinous crime. Your very words, if I remember exactly, were 'Take him south where there are plenty of sharks.' Surely you have not forgotten my rebuke? Did I succumb to your devilish suggestion? No! David is alive. That I take it, is a sufficient answer to your base insinuations. And do not think," he concluded with a sudden flare of anger, "that I will submit for an hour longer

to your shameful disrespect and your unwarranted dictation!"

With deliberate care Barton selected two chairs and placed them facing one another about a yard apart.

"Sit down," he ordered curtly, himself setting the example.

Like a rebellious animal answering the sharp crack of the trainer's whip, Cutts obeyed.

"Now," Barton began, "get this straight. You're going to do as I say. I may not know enough to put you in your proper chair, but I do know enough to break you flat. You and I control fifty-one shares of the capital stock of the All American between us, don't we?"

Cutts nodded. His eyes were filmed. Already he sensed what was coming. While Barton still held the whip of Quayle's supposed murder over his terrified dupe, Cutts had autographed more than one transfer of shares to the chemist "in part payment for technical services rendered." Until this moment Barton had refrained from taunting the banker with his obligatory indiscretions. Theoretically the controlling interest was still in the hands of Cutts and Barton, although the senior member months since had ceased to be more than a hollow nut. In desperation the banker reminded his leech of the alleged reason for the transfers.

"You said it was essential to our plans," he stammered.

"To 'save France,'" Barton agreed with evident relish.

"Otherwise I should never have consented," the banker muttered.

"Of course not. You poor fish, don't you see where you are? I can save France or not as I please. That's a detail. As a matter of fact I intend to play straight. I have reasons," he chuckled. "But what about you? I can buy a vote or two on the Board of Directors and freeze you clean out any time I like. And," he continued, emphasizing the words with his fist, "I shall do it this morning unless you do what I tell you to do. Get me? Unless you're good, Mr. Cutts, you sleep in the gutter. See? I own about everything you think you've got. How many checks have you written for me? You don't know exactly, do you? How much money have you in the bank? You don't know that either, do you? Well, I do. Let me put it frankly, Mr. Cutts, as I would to a friend. You're just a charity case."

"You will keep your promise?" the banker fawned.

"Sure. I'm no double crosser. That's just what I'm trying to do. But how in hell can I 'save civilization' for you if Quayle catches me at it? Even you must see that the game's up when he blows in on us."

"What are you going to do?"

"I? Nothing. You're going to do it this time."

"I refuse! I——"

"Wait till you hear. It won't cost you a cent, and but precious little of your invaluable time. Ten minutes will do the trick. You go over this morning to New York and hunt up Poyère. I'll telephone in a minute to his hotel so you'll be sure of finding him.

He's been hanging around the All American so patiently all these months, trying to overhear our little game, that I feel sure we really owe the poor fool a good earful. You give it to him. Do a proper job. Spill the beans all over him. Rub his nose in the dirt till he knows what it smells like. Then leave him to do the rest. He'll save civilization for us in short order. You get the idea, don't you?"

Cutts smiled grimly.

"I think so," he admitted. Then a possible complication jarred the joy out of him. "My daughter," he began, and stopped abruptly, unable to continue.

"Well," Barton prompted, "what about her?"

"She may be with him"—meaning Quayle.

"Mention that to Poyère. A gallant gentleman like him will make no mistake and overdo things. Trust Poyère to do the gentlemanly stunt. Make it a condition if you like before telling him the real stuff. Take it from me, Miss Cutts is as safe as a church."

It needed no great amount of persuasion to convince Cutts that Sheila would run no risk. Perhaps the sheer bulk of his own certain ruin, should he refuse to obey Barton's order, obscured his view of far-off Sheila's possible unhappiness on the other side of the globe. Barton offered success, the rich fruition of all the banker's grandiose dreams for humanity. Sheila could come to no harm, for Poyère, like Brutus, was an honorable man. Before he was halfway to the suave French banker's hotel, Cutts had fully persuaded himself that what he was about to do was for

Sheila's own good "in the true sense"—whatever that mystic, whitewashing formula may signify.

The "confidential secretary" of course accompanied him. On reaching the hotel Cutts humbly craved his secretary's permission to interview M. Poyère in private. The secretary saw no objection, as Burdette's orders for some time had permitted the patient greater freedom as a reward for "good behavior"—the polite equivalent for the rapid change of Cutts' disorder from the malicious type toward a general, premature senile decay.

M. Poyère was not an early riser, and he disliked being disturbed before he had rounded out his matutinal beauty sleep. Nevertheless in response to Cutts' anxious insistence that his business was of extreme urgency, the head clerk in person finally succeeded in eliciting a peevish reply to his continued ringing of Poyère's telephone. At the mention of Cutts' name the tone instantly sweetened, and the clerk was requested to send the banker up in five minutes.

Cutts found the Frenchman occupying the ornately gilded presidential suite. M. Poyère, looking rather the worse for gaiety, received his caller in bed.

The audience was conducted in the best manner of Napoleon the Third, with mutual respect and dignity. From any lips but those of the President of the All American, the information which Cutts in ten crowded minutes conveyed to the sphynx-like Poyère would have been received with a smile of incredulity. In addition to the great weight of his authority in matters

financial there was a quiet ring of sincerity about the banker's circumstantial story which was as convincing as a stab in the back. Ignoring certain teasing omissions in Cutts' account, M. Poyère grasped the appalling fact that a young American inventor by the name of David King, at present in Sydney, Australia, was in possession of a discovery which, if made public, would put not only France on the rocks but every other civilized country as well.

"You cannot be mistaken," he suggested, "about the identity of this man in Sydney? You are sure that he is the same Mr. King who disappeared from the United States?"

"My informant," Cutts declared pompously, "is entirely trustworthy. She is, in fact, my daughter."

M. Poyère began to see the light. A new significance attached itself to the wide gaps and glaring inconsistencies of the banker's alleged history of King in America. The inventor, he shrewdly suspected, had not voluntarily gone into exile in order to elude the police who sought him for forgery, as Cutts declared, but for another, more compelling reason. The very lies in Cutts' garbled edition of the truth but reinforced the central fact. This was a case for immediate and drastic action. It was in short "Black's move."

The Frenchman's agitation can be estimated by what followed on Cutts' assertion that his own daughter was responsible for "King's" identification. He leapt out of bed in his short silk nightshirt—like most conservatives Poyère scorned pyjamas—and hobbled to the telephone like a lank black beetle, his

bandy legs twinkling in full view of Cutts like a pair of bristly drumsticks. No man, except M. Poyère's physician, had ever seen those scandalous legs undraped.

Before telephoning, M. Poyère made it plain that Cutts might take his leave whenever he pleased.

"You need have no fear, Mr. Cutts," the Frenchman assured him, his hand on the receiver; "I shall see that this affair is kept out of the press."

"My daughter," Cutts began, and hesitated, rightly trusting that the bare suggestion of his thought would be enough for a man of Poyère's gallant sensibilities.

"Miss Cutts' name will not be mentioned," Poyère replied with a dignified bow. "You will excuse me now, Mr. Cutts, this matter is urgent."

M. Poyère was not only a financier of international fame, but also a diplomat and a statesman of wide experience. During the world war his high talents were responsible on more than one occasion for arousing acute mutual suspicion between the allied enemies of his country. His diplomatic work was remarkable for its finesse and its comprehensive lack of scruple. What M. Poyère started he finished, always, of course, with no other motive than that of serving his country loyally.

Being an old hand at many games, and having played most of them as they are usually played by gentlemen of understanding, M. Poyère was not in the least deceived by Cutts' fraudulent account of King's activities in Sydney. Almost as certainly as if he had been told he guessed that Cutts had himself

tried, and failed, to suppress the dangerous inventor. And rightly he suspected Cutts of having still at least one ace up his sleeve.

The first response which M. Poyère gained over the telephone was from one of the less important secret service men whom he had imported to spy on the All American Chemical Products Corporation. Trusting nobody in a matter of dollars and francs, M. Poyère had wisely salted the Corporation as liberally as discretion permitted with agents of his own nationality. Each of these was a high class spy, with many a fine war-catch to his credit, and spoke English with only the slightest trace of an accent. Several of them had in fact earned war decorations for work in the British Government offices and in the British navy, where, during the great conflict, they had acted as unofficial eyes and ears for the French secret service.

The spy was ordered to find out at once by cable all that the city of Sydney had to say about one David King, American. To cover his tracks the spy agreed with Poyère that the information had best be gathered through a neutral detective bureau. The reason vouchsafed for this curiosity regarding King's movements was to be purely financial: one of the larger mercantile agencies wished to have an estimate of King's standing.

It was inevitable that the one truly world-wide detective trust should be selected as the co-operating catspaw. Accordingly, the Sydney branch of Elderton's International Detective Bureau was requested to

cable, "collect," the fullest details of King's activities during his residence in Sydney, and to keep the client informed twice a day, until further notice, of King's movements.

Thus the famous Bureau found itself in the curious position of gathering information about one man for two widely separated parties, the Captain of Miss Cutts' yacht, the *Sheila,* and one of the leading commercial agencies of the United States, if not of the world. Being shrewd men, the directors of the Bureau in Sydney concluded that King was a man of vast monetary importance. In the mere juxtaposition of the names of Miss Cutts and that of the American mercantile agency, they saw a connecting link, whose precise significance they could not evaluate, between Cutts, the greatest international banker of modern finance, and David King, the lately freed suspect of Sydney who undoubtedly had discovered new gold fields of unprecedented richness. Putting the two instructions, that from the Captain and the second from the United States together, they decided to do some investigating on their own account, and to double the already heavy guard on King's movements.

M. Poyère would have been surprised and chagrined to hear of the exact outcome of all his elaborate subtlety. Elderton's not unnaturally jumped to the conclusion that King was a private agent, in fact a gold prospector, of the international bankers, who was about to grab for his own profit the fields which his principals had grubstaked him to explore. They further deduced that Cutts for his part was intending

to seize the fields for himself instead of sharing them with his partners, whoever they might be.

It all looked so natural that the detectives can scarcely be blamed for their mistake: Cutts, through his daughter, was spying on King for his own private ends; the commercial agency was keeping an eye on King in order to ascertain just what skull-duggery the astute Cutts intended unloading on his associates. This indeed was an extremely reasonable theory, and the detectives acted accordingly.

The Sydney bureau easily satisfied its American client by cabling wholesale all that had as yet appeared in the leading Sydney papers regarding the trial of King for robbery, his acquittal, and the institution of his suit for damages against the City, and by supplementing all this mass of sensational journalism with observations of their own regarding King's "dynamited" hulk in the harbor. For five hours this river of information streamed over the cables, debouching in M. Poyère's reception room at the hotel.

Poyère did not wait to hear it all before getting busy with his chiefs in Paris. The cables between New York and Europe began to grow hot under the rapid, uninterrupted exchange of long messages in code and shorter, more emphatic replies in the same medium. Before long the cables to Polynesia and to every naval station or base within a radius of five thousand miles of Sydney were bristling with sharp, non-committal orders. The sea forces of civilization were being mobilized to repel the threatened invasion

by one man who, single-handed, could overthrow society were he so minded.

The captains and admirals of the fleet were not informed why they were ordered to hold themselves and their battle-cruisers, destroyers, submarines, depth bombs and the rest in instant readiness to obey further orders.

Nor were the land forces neglected. Although neither Poyère nor his collaborators all over the civilized world anticipated that it was King's intention to end his days in Australia, they immediately mobilized their secret services for possible emergencies on shore. It was a ticklish situation. King, they believed, would scorn words and express himself only in action. But should he prove unable to hold his tongue, the damage to civilization would be done.

Less than thirty-six hours after Sheila wrote out her cablegram to Burdette, the consulates of several countries in Australia began to receive urgent orders from "home" to co-operate with the best help obtainable in spying on King. A little later, agents of doubtful character and shady antecedents were unearthed and recruited. Within ten days the scouts of the international land forces proper, rushed from the nearest ports, began to be landed from "visiting" European battleships in Sydney, and one friendly warvessel after another called at the Australian ports on their alleged "training cruises" to unload secretly one or more undesirables apiece, until, within three weeks, the land forces of civilization attained their full fight-

ing strength. Of the dozens of secret service agents, spies, ex-criminals and adventurers thus flung wholesale on the hospitable shores of Australia, not one would have been permitted to set foot on Australian soil had their real errand been suspected.

Although the land forces were mobilized they did not assume the offensive, for through it all Poyère played a masterly hand. Ingenuous and aboveboard in his dealings with the friendly Powers whose collaboration he had invited and whose safety was at stake no less than was that of his native land, he yet contrived to conceal from all but the true masters of France his secondary purpose. It might be impossible in the stress of circumstances to bring this deeper game to a winning conclusion, but, whatever happened, France could not lose, and she might gain a secret advantage which would forever render her independent of America and the rest of the world.

Having thus attended to foreign affairs, M. Poyère turned all his subtle skill to domestic matters. While the network of ocean cables was still sizzling with code orders, he called up his chief spy for a conference. This man was the organizer of the French secret service force spying on the All American. He was now instructed to widen the circle of his vision to include Barton. Cutts was neglected as of small importance. For months Poyère's agents and the astute diplomat himself had known that Barton, not Cutts, was the guiding spirit of the All American.

The upshot of the chief spy's conference with his master was important. Three of the "best" men—

in the technical sense—known to the experts of the European secret services were cabled for to Paris. All three were veteran graduates of the school of crime, and were entirely trustworthy, even to the point of going to the gallows if necessary without opening their mouths.

Barton's brilliant move against Quayle, indeed, was a little more comprehensive than he had intended. He had not foreseen—in spite of his calculating brain—that he himself might be called on to combat unscrupulous viciousness of civilization clawing like a cornered tiger to save its own life.

Ten days after Cutts received Sheila's message, M. Poyère abruptly announced to all of his gay friends and more sedate financial cronies that he had been suddenly recalled to Paris. To his great regret he must leave them all immediately.

Naturally, Poyère had not the slightest intention of returning to Paris. Leaving Barton and the All American to the anxious care of his trusty agents, the banker-statesman quietly slipped away to San Francisco, where he boarded a monster malevolent-looking battle-cruiser belonging to his native land. This great gray fighter, one of the fastest afloat, had been rushed up from Valparaiso in response to "home" orders relayed by wireless on the day following Sheila's message. At the time she was cruising the seven seas with a full complement of naval cadets. Any other warship would have served the contemplated purpose: this one happened to be in slightly the best strategic position at the moment. Its services might

not be required. Only the future could tell. The home authorities rightly took the stand that the best means of circumventing emergencies is to prepare for them.

Sheila's well-meant missile had slipped from her hand. Her aim was good, for she hit her mark. But what she hurled at her father rebounded, and was now about to raise the very devil against the man she loved better than her own life.

CHAPTER XVII

THWARTED

THE suit of David King against the City of Sydney was well on its way, having dragged along for three weeks. Not being a member of the Australian Bar, Jarvis of course could not represent the plaintiff. Nevertheless his shrewd common-sense directed the fight of King's side from behind the firing line. In the two weeks of close association with King he had made a quiet study of his client's character. "Not a bad sort at bottom," was his final verdict, "and no fool. He knows what he's doing. I wonder if he thinks I don't? All this fuss over the loss of his machinery and junk is a smoke screen to distract public attention from his real objective, whatever that may be. He cares no more about the blowing up of the hulk than I do. He's still well-fixed financially. Now, just what is his little game?" Unfortunately for his peace of mind, Jarvis was never to solve the problem of King's purpose.

This morning King was being grilled by his opponents. They had taken the reasonable stand that until the plaintiff proved in detail the value of his destroyed property, the question of damages was still up in the air, and not likely to come down.

"But what, precisely, was the nature of this costly

plant that you allege was destroyed by the undue interference of the police?"

"Electrical machinery."

"Rather a broad description, Mr. King. Do you mean electric bells, electric curling irons, electric washers, electric toasters, or electric belts?"

When the approving laughter which greeted this brilliant sally had subsided—the judge was a little slow with his gavel—King answered.

"I paid no admission to this circus. If you choose to perform for the amusement of the gallery I can't stop you."

"Order!"

The judge performed beautifully. King's frank and cynical stare actually made him blush. Was he part of the circus too? As for the spectators, they enjoyed themselves hugely. Like good colonials they took a sporting interest in the proceedings, and even betted freely on the outcome. It was at least as exciting as the annual cricket match between Molehill and Mudbottom. The defense coughed and changed its tactics.

"Will you tell the Court in your own way what sort of electrical machinery was destroyed?"

To Jarvis, keenly watching his client's face, it appeared that King made a lightning decision to tell a half truth.

"High tension electrical apparatus."

"And what is high tension electrical apparatus used for?"

"A number of things."

"For example? Commercially?"

Jarvis detected a flicker of triumph in King's eyes. The defense was doing exactly as he wished. King could henceforth tell the whole truth without loss to himself. By an ingenious statement of the truth with intention to deceive he had sidetracked his opponents from the main line.

"Commercially, one of the most important applications is to the flaming arc. That is how nitric acid is made from the nitrogen of the air and water vapor. From the nitric acid as a starting point, fertilizers, explosives and a great many other useful things are manufactured."

"Ammonium nitrate, for instance?"

"It is possible," King admitted, as if grudgingly conceding a point in favor of his opponents.

"Are you aware, Mr. King, that the manufacture of ammonium nitrate can become an extremely dangerous process?"

"No. It can't."

"I see you did not read the newspapers while you were washing out all that gold," the counsel for the defense remarked with playful irony. "Have you ever heard of the B. F. T.?"

King considered for a moment before trusting himself to reply.

"I believe I have," he yielded unwillingly. "But I am not sure."

"The B. F. T. were the largest chemical manufacturers in Europe, or, for that matter, in the world. Their entire plant and the surrounding country for

a radius of fifty miles were annihilated several months ago. Chemists are agreed that ammonium nitrate, which you say is harmless, caused the explosion. And if you had taken the trouble, like an intelligent person, to read the papers since your return to civilization, you would have learned that innocent ammonium nitrate can destroy so solid and substantial an article as gold. It is rumored that the international banking firm of Cutts lost heavily in the B. F. T. explosion."

"This may all be very interesting to the audience, for anything I know. What has it to do with my case?"

"It has everything to do with your case. You must prove to the satisfaction of this Court that you were not engaged in the manufacture of ammonium nitrate when your property, like the B. F. T., blew up. You have intimated that you were using the electric arc. And you have told the Court that the use of the flaming electric arc might well be the starting point for the manufacture of dangerous explosives. The B. F. T. disaster taught the world that large quantities of ammonium nitrate are more dangerous than dynamite. It is against the law, Mr. King, to manufacture explosives within the city limits. Your hulk, in any equitable interpretation of the law, lay well within the proscribed area."

King threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"Order!" rapped the judge, "order!"

The spectators smirked with the defense. King had been neatly cornered. But he was a good sport—he knew what cricket was, even if he was a bounder and

an American. Wasn't he taking it like a gentleman? Jarvis had another theory. King was laughing because the defense had made an incomparably greater fool of itself than he had tried to make it.

"Your facts may be straight," he remarked, when order reigned once more. "But your logic, you will excuse me for saying so, is simply childish."

This time two-thirds of the audience sympathized with the judge. King seemed to lack the first notions of legal decency and the just respect due to a court of justice. To insinuate that an eminent and respected barrister, an LL.D. of Oxford University and an authority on the logic of Aristotle, was mentally childish, was the limit. To the regret of the outraged two-thirds, the hour for the luncheon recess arrived before the Court could administer the scathing rebuke which, no doubt, it had thought of by this time. The case was adjourned till ten o'clock the following morning.

Jarvis stopped King before he could hurry away according to his usual custom.

"Why not join me at lunch?" he suggested, "and talk things over?"

"I'm sorry," King replied with the faintest possible sarcasm, "but I have a previous engagement. Some black fellows who drifted into town yesterday afternoon have asked me to share their potluck."

Jarvis suspected his client of lying, but of course could say nothing. Why did the man persist in insulting those who would be his friends? Jarvis gave it up, and went to lunch with the judge. That ruffled

nabob needed a rub-down and a thorough buttering to restore him to good humor. Jarvis, in the interests of his ill-natured client, supplied what was necessary in the way of good food, better wine and delicate flattery.

That day was a critical one for Sheila. The long struggle with herself after the scene in the courtroom had come to an end. Cost what it might, she would learn from David's own lips what her father had done to him. That glance of stony indifference in the courtroom had held neither hate nor resentment. She was included in the cold condemnation which the injured man passed upon her father. He must have learned from the townspeople whose yacht the *Sheila* was long before his eyes met hers in the courtroom, even if he had not guessed from the name and the home port lettered on the stern. Yet he had made no attempt to communicate with her, although his hulk was anchored less than a hundred yards from the yacht.

In the restless nights since King's discharge on the Kalgoorlie accusation, another suspicion had crept into her mind. David was shunning her because he planned some terrible revenge on her father. Perhaps, to acknowledge that he knew her might thwart his plans. She could not see how; yet the thought was insistent and would not be denied. Jarvis had talked openly of his guess that "King" was suing the city of Sydney merely as a clever camouflage. As positively as if she had heard it from David himself, she knew what he had been doing in the hulk. He had been experi-

menting on a large scale with his invention. But why should he take such unheard of precautions to preserve secrecy, even to the total destruction of his costly plant? And why should an acknowledged friendship or acquaintance with herself be so dangerous to his plans? She considered the two sides of the puzzle together and decided to solve the mystery at the earliest moment feasible.

She must not embarrass David by endangering the success of his work, whatever might be its nature, or he would hate her. He was a man who might easily put ambition above love. Her approach must be discreet, and above all no human beings but he and she must know that they had met. If she must choose between David and her father, she was ready. Her life belonged to herself, not to her father. To live her life with simple justice to herself she would, if necessary, join forces with David. It should be war, if he insisted, but she could soften it with mercy to the vanquished.

Her first flaming anger against her father had cooled. She could now see him as she imagined he was, a man of diseased character whom sickness had betrayed into the actions of a madman. No man in his senses could have invented that lie about David's death in Singapore. Even the most daring of criminals would hesitate to spread such a falsehood to cover up his crime. It was too dangerous a lie; one false word, a single slip, and the truth would be out. Her father must be temporarily insane.

Her immediate task was to win back David to her

love. One hint which Jarvis had unconsciously dropped gave her hope. "King," he said, "is sometimes just like a spoilt kid." Sheila knew enough about children to be perfectly familiar with the almost universal tendency of the very young to fly into tantrums and take a perverted pleasure in the self infliction of pain. She was the proper medicine for David's disorder. With a sigh of thankfulness she recalled that he had been blessed with a sly sense of humor. Surely the roots of it were not yet dried up.

Sheila had laid her plans carefully. She told the Jarvises that some old English acquaintances of her mother, hearing that she was in Sydney, had invited her to spend the day with them. She might not be back till late, and possibly not till the next morning. If they invited her to do so, she would stay the night. It sounded plausible, and was accepted at its face value.

The morning of her attempt she went over early to the city and spent the day reading *Penguin Island* in a secluded corner of the park.

About five o'clock she returned to the business section of the city. She had learned from Elderton's, through the Captain, the location of the hotel where David had taken up his quarters since quitting the Salvation Army Refuge, and on several previous expeditions she had carefully explored the immediate neighborhood. Almost directly opposite the hotel was a fairly respectable restaurant, whose front windows commanded an unobstructed view of the other side of the street for four or five blocks. A customer

seated at one of the front tables could observe the approach and entry of the hotel guests without fear of discovery.

Sheila had prepared for her vigil by several previous visits to the place. On each of these occasions she had tipped the waiters extravagantly, and on the last she had reserved one of the front tables for this evening. She entered the restaurant and ordered an elaborate course dinner which it would take well over an hour to serve.

"I may have to sit here very late tonight," she told the waiter, "as I am expecting to meet a friend. She did not know by which train she might arrive."

She weighted her words with gold. The sophisticated waiter understood these little affairs perfectly. Assuring her that she might stay as long as she liked, he brought her several magazines to pass away the time. The hardened young sinner felt rather sorry for her. She did not look like a girl who would be a party to an assignation.

The hours dragged on. David did not appear. Sheila was sure that he had not entered the hotel. Although pretending studiously to read, she had not once taken her eyes from the street.

At twelve o'clock the waiter apologized for telling her that the place must close.

"You might wait for the lady in the lobby of the hotel across the street," he diplomatically suggested, thinking that the lady in question had never worn a skirt.

Sheila thanked him gratefully with words and with

gold. Taking his advice she boldly entered the hotel lobby and engaged two rooms, one for herself, and one for her expected "friend"—a Mrs. Catlett from the country with two young children. She registered as "Gertrude Anderson."

"I may as well wait here," she said, sinking into a comfortable chair which commanded a view of the entrance.

She waited two hours. To sit there longer would excite suspicion. She went to the desk and instructed the clerk to tell "Mrs. Catlett" that Miss Anderson had retired after waiting up till two o'clock. There was nothing to be done but go to bed and be fresh for the encounter with David in the morning.

At six o'clock she rose, dressed, and slipped out of the hotel. If David had spent the night in the hotel he would most probably still be in bed. She walked briskly to the nearest all night telegraph office. There she sent a telegram, addressed to Miss Gertrude Anderson at the hotel, informing her that Mrs. Catlett and the children would not arrive until that afternoon. She then hurried back to the hotel to confide to the clerk that she had been unable to sleep for worry over her friend, and had gone to a neighboring hotel to see if she had registered there by mistake. The sympathetic clerk suggested an early cup of tea as a pick-me-up. Sheila gratefully accepted and drank her tea in the lobby.

The telegram was delivered at seven o'clock, just before the night clerk went off duty. He shared Sheila's relief. She was now free to hover about the

hotel lobby all day if she chose. Instead she crossed the street and became the earliest breakfaster in the restaurant. It was a new waiter, one of the morning shift, who served her, so she could safely repeat the story of the expected friend. She waited there till half-past ten. At that hour she knew David must be in court. Taking the bull by the horns she decided to join the spectators in the courtroom and watch a chance to follow David. She could explain to Jarvis that she had stayed all night with her friends, and had now just dropped in to make an appointment for returning together to the yacht when his day's work was finished. She was determined, no matter what happened, to speak with her lover before she went back to the yacht. The long, fruitless vigil had decided her. She knew now that life without his love was not worth the living. With a resolute firmness about the mouth she tipped the waiter and left the restaurant.

Jarvis would have been sorely puzzled could he have followed his client the previous morning to "lunch" with the hospitable black fellows. The latter existed only in King's imagination. He had refused Jarvis' invitation because he had immediate business of his own. Once free of the lawyers, King had hurried straight to the nearest reading room. At the desk he started to ask for something and abruptly changed his mind. The attendant had come eagerly forward to wait on him. Every newspaper reader in Sydney knew King by sight.

"Have you a copy of today's *Bulletin* not in use?"

The attendant addressed him by name and directed him to the newspaper rack. Unaware that his slightest movements were being watched, King unfolded a paper, made a short pretense at reading the advertisements, restored the paper to the rack, and walked out.

He next entered a stationer's shop on a side street and bought a cheap writing pad. On reaching the street he walked away from the shop and looked around to see that he was not observed. Finding the street deserted for a block either way, he rapidly wrote out a long list of names of newspapers with dates of issues, tore off the sheet, and tossed the tablet into the gutter.

Shoving the paper into his pocket he turned down an alley and hastened toward a shabby quarter of the city notorious for its squalid bars. Each loafer he met was the object of a quick, searching scrutiny. Presently he met the right man, a tramp whom he had never seen before, but who, in his semi-intoxicated condition, seemed the ideal tool for his purpose.

This man was in fact one of Elderton's agents. At a reasonable distance in his rear and quite unsuspected by the agent himself a sedate business man had been following all the morning, so that the "spotter" was himself being carefully "spotted." When the loafer turned into the alley this second "spotter" continued on his way, knowing that his confederates at the farther end would take up the trail.

Each and every man of Elderton's staff assigned to

the King job was himself at that minute being spied upon by at least two members of the hastily mobilized "land forces" of Poyère and his allies. When money is no object it is possible in two or three weeks to perfect a highly efficient organization to keep exact track of one man. When, further, the consulates of several civilized nations are co-operating with the secret service of the country in which they are domiciled to the same end, the very cobblestones seem to bear tales against the unfortunate individual who is being hounded.

Not one of the spies employed by the allies knew why he was detailed to the job. All they knew was that they were to account for every minute of King's twenty-four-hour days. They soon learned of course that Elderton's men were on the same assignment. To shadow King, it usually proved sufficient to track Elderton's detectives. King was indeed watched.

"Do you want that?" King demanded, accosting the tramp and exhibiting a generous handful of gold and silver coins.

The thirsty half-drunk did want it. At King's order he braced up and followed his prospective employer at a respectful distance back to the more prosperous part of town. King knew the shortest way to the central news agency he was seeking. A block before he reached it he walked back to meet his follower, gave him some money and the paper on which he had written the names of newspapers, and told the man to go ahead and fill the order. While the drunk was buying the papers, King stood back out of sight in a doorway.

When King's envoy, reeling under two heavy bundles of newspapers done up in plain brown paper, rejoined him, King crammed a handful of money into the man's pocket, took the bundles, and made off as fast as he could walk toward the park. Arrived there he chose a deserted spot behind a clump of shrubs, and scanned the papers one after another for news of the financial implication of Cutts through the B. F. T. disaster.

Having found and read what he wanted—more information would have been desirable, but he had been forced to sample the dates, not knowing exactly when the financial public learned the appalling facts of how hard Cutts was hit by the B. F. T. disaster—he left the papers where they lay and hastened back to the city, followed by one tramp and two well-dressed men who "chanced" to be walking through the park. The tramp was one of Elderton's, the two gentlemen privates in M. Poyère's land forces.

And—to give point to the irony of the situation—from where she sat, immersed in *Penguin Island*, Sheila might have seen the clump of shrubs behind which King studied his papers, had she cared to glance in that direction.

King had not learned a great deal, but it was enough. A repetition of his former tactics put him in possession of a razor and a pair of scissors, purchased from a pawnshop. The tramp who helped him out this time was less drunk than the first, but had the advantage of obviously needing a shave and a haircut, to say nothing of a general wash. A third essay of the

maneuver netted him a tweed suit, a subdued shirt and a pair of inoffensive low brown shoes, all bought from a secondhand clothes shop. He had to chance the fit. The tramp who made the deal was as nearly his own build as he could find among those sufficiently far gone in their cups.

His last two moves he played single-handed. He went to the bank and took all of his remaining money out of the safe deposit box where it had lain since Williams paid it over in notes. The bank, as a mere matter of routine, was constantly under watch. King kept his money there; he must visit it periodically. His next act was to buy a cake of common soap. Shaving soap was out of the question, lest the bleareyed clerk in the smelly little shop should recognize him and jump to conclusions.

He was now ready for business. Returning to the park he chose the "wildest" spot he could find, and waited till nightfall. A small artificial lake supplied him with shaving water; the scissors, soap and razor did the rest, painfully. It took him a few minutes to change his clothes and shoes. An hour and a half later he was aboard the train, en route to the seaport of Melbourne. Although King had used every precaution humanly possible, he had no chance whatever against the forces fighting him. Aboard the same train were three of Elderton's best men and six of Poyère's, or rather, of "the allies." In Melbourne, for the three and a half days of his stay, he became Daniel Quinn. For obvious reasons King did not care to buy a steamship ticket in Sydney. David King was

about to die; David Quayle was rising from the dead.

To this day Jarvis does not know what became of King. For an hour or two he believed with the miners that King had slipped away to his goldfields. He has since framed innumerable theories, not one of which is worth its frame.

Reaching her destination shortly before twelve o'clock, Sheila found the passageways jammed with knots of excited men. At the door of the courtroom itself she saw Jarvis and his allies. They also were talking in high, rapid voices. Catching sight of her, Jarvis at once drew her into the debate.

"Has he skipped out?"

"Who?" she faltered, all but stifled by the oppressive pounding of her heart.

"King. He hasn't been heard of since the adjournment yesterday morning. Haven't you seen the extras? They're just out."

"I have only just come down town."

Jarvis thrust a paper into her hand and resumed his argument with King's attorneys. Calm as death she read the short, sensational account of King's disappearance. On his failure to appear in court at ten o'clock, a telephone message had brought out the fact that he had not slept in his bed. Indeed, none of the hotel employees had seen him since the previous morning at nine o'clock when he left the hotel to go to court. Reading on she devoured every word of yesterday's court report reprinted verbatim. King's answers to the questions about the uses of the flaming

electric arc in the manufacture of explosives gave her a terrific shock. She could read between the lines where the lawyers, not sharing her knowledge of King's identity, would see only blank white paper.

The reference to her father in the testimony, "It is rumored that the international banking firm of Cutts lost heavily in the B. F. T.," froze her blood. What was the nature of David's invention, and what terrible revenge was he about to take on her father? He was probably even now on his way to New York. Neither Sydney nor the rest of the world would hear of him again until the unnameable disaster had happened.

The memory of that cold, dead glance which he had cast over the crowd in the courtroom before his eyes rested on hers, came back with a sinister meaning. Oh, if only she could have spoken with him for five minutes, her love might have revived the human pity in him before it was too late. The indefiniteness of her knowledge, the intangible vagueness of her half formed suspicions as to his purpose, but sharpened her anguish. What was the meaning of his tirade, *"the wet rot of civilization"?* Was her father not the sole object of his cold hatred? Would he destroy the world?

Suddenly she became rational. Her fear exhausted itself and her panic subsided.

"I must go back to the yacht now, Mr. Jarvis," she said, handing him back the extra. "You won't be coming till later?"

"I'm afraid I must stay to watch developments—

if there are any. Shall I send someone to the wharf with you?"

"Oh no. Thank you, just the same."

What should she do? Matters had reached a crisis. She was determined now to sacrifice anything and everything if need be to right the injustice her father had done David, whatever might be its nature. She hastened to the nearest cable office. There she despatched an urgent message to Burdette.

> *"Please tell my father that David has disappeared from Sydney. For good reasons I believe he is on his way to New York. Do not tell him what follows. I must be free to help David. Will you cable to Mrs. Jarvis that her mother is ill and that the Jarvises must return at once to Pasadena? Sign your message Doctor Brown. Rush.*
>
> *"Sheila Cutts."*

Before proceeding further she must see the Captain. If Elderton's agency was worth its pay they should be able to help her in locating David. At the pier she found the Captain nervously pacing back and forth on the lookout for her. The moment he caught sight of her he hurried to meet her.

"I have been waiting hours for you," he began. "Elderton's reports that David is on his way to Melbourne."

"They know where he is going?" she exclaimed joyously. "Oh, thank Heaven!"

"Three of their men are on the same train. They will report to the Melbourne office where David goes and keep an eye on him."

"Then I can find out in Melbourne?"

"You are going to follow?"

"Yes. I have made up my mind to settle this."

"Very well. You can rely on Elderton's. They have done a first class job. What am I to do?"

She explained her device to get rid of the Jarvises.

"You must wait here till Burdette's message arrives. Then see that they catch this evening's fast mail steamer for San Francisco. Insist on paying their passage. There is plenty of money in the top drawer of the writing desk in my cabin. Here are the keys. You can say I'm off on a shopping tour and that I won't be back till after their steamer sails. When they are gone, rush the yacht round to Melbourne. I'll let you know where I am as soon as you register with the harbor master. Burdette's answer to my cable will be here in about an hour and a half. Can you come with me to the station? I want to engage a special train if possible."

They hurried off. On the way to the station they dropped into Elderton's where the Chief gave Sheila a note to the Melbourne office authorizing the men there to tell her all the facts concerning King.

"There is something you should know," the Chief remarked as he handed her the envelope.

"Yes?"

"King is being shadowed by at least a dozen men besides our own."

Sheila went white.

"Who are they?"

"We have not the slightest clue. They are not

members of the Sydney police. Some of them are foreigners. Perhaps," he concluded significantly, "you can give us a hint?"

Although she tried to exculpate her father, past experience was too strong for her and she suspected —wrongly.

"Are any of the spies American?"

"We cannot be certain, but we think not."

"Not American?" she echoed in blank amazement and sudden fear. "Are they English, Australian?"

"We think not," the Chief replied, closely watching her face.

"Oh, what can it mean?"

"That is what we should like to know," the Chief replied drily. "Your friend King seems to be a much sought young man. By the way, he has shaved off his beard. You will recognize him, of course, when you see him?"

Sheila's wit was not asleep.

"I fear not," she said coolly. "A beard makes a great difference to a man."

Her tone left the Chief in doubt. Had she known King before he wore a beard? He guessed that she had, but was not sure. Any way, her cool answer undeceived him on the possibility of tricking her into a betrayal.

"Would you like us to send some of our men with you to Melbourne?"

"How many would you suggest?"

"Better take four. King may find himself with a fight on his hands. The men won't bother you per-

sonally, Miss Cutts. They will report directly to the Melbourne office."

"Very well. I shall try to engage a special train. Your men will take it too?"

"Certainly. You must have at least two carriages. They can travel in the baggage van."

While waiting for her special to be made up, Sheila wrote a short note to the Jarvises and addressed it to Pasadena.

> *"I must apologize," she wrote, "for having deceived you, but I shall not presume to beg your forgiveness should we ever meet again. Certain events made it imperative for me to act quickly and in absolute privacy. If you can still think kindly of me, please believe that what I did was more urgent than a matter of life or death and that it was not entirely selfish. As a last appeal to your old friendship I beg you to destroy this note as soon as you have read it. Forgive and forget your sincere friend,*
>
> *"Sheila Cutts."*

Half an hour later she was speeding as fast as steel and steam would take her to Melbourne. Before nightfall, the *Sheila,* with all the steam she could crowd, was bound for the same port, and the Jarvises were well started on their way to San Francisco.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALLIES

SHEILA's second cablegram to Burdette, asking him to tell her father that David had disappeared from Sydney, and stating that for good reasons she believed he was en route to New York, while not so far-reaching in its effects, was even more crucial for Cutts than the first. It reached him, via the "confidential secretary," just as he was about to join Barton on a brief tour of inspection of the all but completed aquarium.

Cutts listened to the message in dazed silence.

"Very well," he said, when the secretary finished retailing the cablegram.

"Is there any reply? Dr. Burdette will transmit it if there is."

"There is none."

"May I ask what are your plans for the day?" the nurse inquired respectfully.

"I shall inspect the shark tank this morning with Dr. Barton," Cutts replied pompously, "and this afternoon I shall probably play a few holes on the links. Will you be ready at two?"

"Certainly, sir. I presume you will not need me on the inspection this morning?"

"I think not," Cutts agreed, keeping up the pitiable pretence that he was a free agent.

"In case you want me," the "secretary" volunteered, to inform Cutts as delicately as possible that he was still a patient, "I shall be within easy call. You said you and Dr. Barton are planning particularly to inspect the shark tank?"

"Yes. It is almost done. The workmen will be here tomorrow to clean up the last of the concrete frames and begin the steel and glass work. Dr. Barton tells me the concrete has set most excellently."

"I am glad to hear that, sir," the secretary replied. "You take such an interest in the aquarium I hope it will be a success."

"It will," Cutts assured him with a tricky smile. "As I told you when we first came over here, the Cutts aquarium will go down in history as the most notable contribution of our age to the uplift of humanity."

"A love of natural history, particularly of fishes," the nurse warmly agreed, thinking to humor his patient, "is without doubt one of the most humanizing influences of modern society."

"It is indeed," Cutts chuckled, with a subtle grin like that of an ape who has just filched the bananas behind his trainer's back.

Still chuckling occasionally with almost imbecile glee, Cutts passed into the aquarium, carefully closing the door behind him. Barton was waiting, eager to begin the tour of inspection.

"Well," he greeted his "employer," "I shall start installing the coils in the shark tank the day after

tomorrow. In a month we shall be operating full blast."

"Provided we are not interrupted," Cutts conceded with an arch smile.

"Interrupted?" Barton repeated sharply, instantly on the alert. "What's up now, Mr. Cutts?"

"Oh, nothing in particular," the banker laughed. "There might well have been a serious mishap, however, had I not acted so promptly in the Poyère affair."

In reply to Barton's rapid fire cross-examination Cutts divulged the latest from Sheila.

"And you see nothing serious in this?" Barton demanded ominously, scornfully, when the banker finished.

"Trust Poyère."

Cutts mouthed his advice like an oracle. The chemist favored him with a single glance of blasting contempt.

"Mr. Cutts," he said evenly, "I believe you are a dangerous lunatic. And I'll bet you've bungled again. Quayle will smash you yet. 'Trust Poyère?' You dumb idiot! Didn't I tell you the very first evening we talked things over to trust nobody? To save your soul you can't keep your mouth shut. Why don't you carry a raw egg—a rotten one—in your mouth? That would keep you from talking."

The banker flew into a white, futile passion.

"It was you who sent me to Poyère!"

Barton glowered at him, his face a study in cold hatred and contempt.

"I did," he admitted with ominous control of his

voice. "And you did the rest. That's obvious. What the hell did you blab to that —— —— Frenchman?"

Although Cutts had seldom heard such obscenities as Barton applied to Poyère, he vaguely guessed their meaning by a sort of vile instinct which every man, even the cleanest, possesses when he has passed the age of adolescence. The filthy epithets stung the last remnants of his manhood to a flaming philippic against the man who had uttered them. All the pent-up hatred and loathing for his betrayer flashed from the banker's tongue like fire from a prophet's. That withering denunciation was but the more impressive because it was delivered in a low tone with rapid, crystal lucidity. The faltering mind for at least five minutes walked firmly and unafraid, sane and clear, through the light of truth. If Cutts did not spare Barton neither did he spare himself. This was his true confession and the terrible expiation of all his guilt. The sunset of his sanity blazed clear and unclouded. Before the night closed down forever on his mind he saw himself as he was, and with no more than absolute justice he passed sentence on Barton as the evil genius who had preyed upon a sick man's frailty.

Barton took the scorching invective with folded arms and an expressionless face. Only his sombre eyes never left the banker's, and only they spoke. Cutts was too far carried away by his own fiery whirlwind to heed the fiendish fury, cold as ice, merciless as steel, in those steady eyes. The chemist waited calmly till Cutts finished.

"All that is beside the point," he sneered. "What did you tell Poyère?"

"What you told me to tell him," Cutts faltered, obedient once more as the fire quickly died in him, to leave him cold and shaking like a man with ague.

"Sure?" the chemist scoffed. "I'll let it go at that. You told him what I ordered you to tell him. That's clear. But *how* did you tell him? Do you know? You don't? Well, I do, worse luck. For the past week I've been shadowed. Laugh that off, you crazy fool!"

"You must be mistaken," the banker stammered, trembling like an aspen leaf.

Barton affected to take this seemingly sensible view.

"I guess you're right," he laughed. "All this night-work is getting on my nerves at last. Babe's been sick too, raising the devil generally with me this past week." "Babe" was Barton's latest fancy in young beauty. "I've been seeing things, that's all. Well, let's have a look at the shark tank."

The storm was over, ended as abruptly as were most of their vicious quarrels, in stubborn silence, contemptuous on Barton's side, resentful and bitter on Cutts'. They walked moodily on to inspect the tank.

Late that afternoon, far away on the other side of the globe Sheila was conferring with the head of the Melbourne branch of Elderton's. Her four helpers, the men sent with her by the Sydney office, shared the conference.

"If you would only tell us what you know, Miss

Cutts," the Chief was saying, "we might be able to help you much more effectively. Let me tell you what our office suspects. King, we believe, was paid by your father or by the Cutts group as a whole, to prospect certain goldfields. The competitors of the Cutts group have heard of King's success, and they are determined to make him talk before your father can send trustworthy men with King to locate the new fields. As they say in America, your father's rivals are scheming to jump his claims. Now, isn't it a fact, Miss Cutts, that King—if that is his right name—was sent out to Australia to follow up some tip your father got on those fields?"

Sheila looked doubtfully at this well-dressed, high class detective. Was he honest? Or was he merely trying like the Sydney populace to worm out the secret of David's goldfields? Would it be more politic to let him continue believing a plausible theory which simply was not so, or to undeceive him by a candid confession of her own ignorance?

"I do not know," she replied truthfully. "My father never discussed business with me."

"You knew King then in America, then?" the detective demanded sharply.

"Did I say that?" she countered. "If so, I am not aware that I did."

Seeing that he could hope to get little from her, the Chief resumed the discussion of legitimate business.

"You are determined to register at Quinn's hotel?"

"King's," she corrected, alert to foil the rather ob-

vious attempt to make her betray the suspect's right name.

"He's 'Quinn' here," the Chief retorted. "I thought I mentioned yesterday that King had registered at the Hobart under the name of Daniel Quinn."

"I believe you did," Sheila admitted. "I was thinking of something else."

"Well, these four men will take rooms on the same floor as yours. 'Quinn' is being closely watched. My advice to you," he continued seriously, "is to stay out of this mess. If you interfere you may get badly hurt. Those foreigners trailing your man look like a pretty desperate gang."

"All the more reason," she flashed, "that I should warn Mr. King."

"Can't we do it for you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I prefer to do it myself."

"As you like," the Chief retorted, somewhat nettled. "We have warned you. Whether you ask it or not, I'm going to send two extra men along specially to look after you. This agency cannot afford to have one of its clients come to harm over an affair which it is supposed to be investigating."

Sheila made no objection, and with her bodyguard discreetly following at a respectful distance made her way to the Hobart where "Daniel Quinn" was registered. In all there were now six detectives ostensibly on Sheila's side, against an unknown number working for the civilized allies.

The Hobart was a second-rate hotel on a side street, patronized chiefly by country folk coming into the City either sightseeing or marketing their produce. As it was now the middle of the week, the hotel was practically deserted, except for "Quinn" and the allied spies detailed to watch him. These all had rooms on the second floor. Sheila and her party, independently of course, asked for rooms on the same floor. Elderton's, efficient in little things at least, had ascertained the exact location of Quinn's room almost as soon as he registered.

The agency had also learned all that Quinn did since the moment he left the train on arriving in Melbourne. Before seeking a hotel he had hurried to the Trans-Pacific Steamship Office. There he purchased a first-class ticket to San Francisco on the fast mail steamer sailing at seven P.M. the following Saturday. The ticket was purchased on Wednesday afternoon. Quinn therefore found himself with three and a half days on his hands to be killed in Melbourne. Conversely, the allied land forces of civilization found themselves with three and a half days on their hands, in which they might either kill Quinn, or let him escape to the broad Pacific to fight out there his single-handed battle against the world. Through Elderton's Sheila of course learned only of the ticket. The maneuvers of the land forces were beyond her ken, because Elderton's agency could see nothing farther than the fact that King, or Quinn, was being assiduously shadowed by a sharp-looking gang of hard characters who too evidently were experts in their profession.

The land forces, for their part, knew nothing beyond the single fact that they must obey orders from Great Headquarters across the water to the last letter. "Theirs not to reason why," theirs was to do as they were told. By almost hourly cablegrams to Europe they kept Great Headquarters minutely informed of their quarry's movements. Sharp, short replies by cable, frequently relayed by wireless, kept the efficient land forces constantly on the march.

Putting all facts and possibilities together, the star-chamber at Great Headquarters, consisting of a majority of the ablest international strategists living, had decided to attack at once without mentioning their decision to the unfortunate minority. The minority, consisting of M. Poyère alone, was not consulted. In other words, the unsuspecting M. Poyère had been cut adrift by his allies with the greatest calmness and dispatch.

To save their faces before themselves the majority expressed the opinion that M. Poyère, were he present in person, would concur in this sudden new plan to launch an immediate land attack, although Poyère, it should be mentioned, merely to keep the historical records clear, had strenuously insisted that a naval attack was the one safe move.

The truth appears to be this. The majority, being less stupid than the minority believed, was not taken in by M. Poyère's brilliant prevarications. To accuse their confrère openly of seeking by means of this projected naval ambush to secure an overwhelming advantage for himself and France would be funda-

mentally indecent. The polite way, the way in accordance with the standardized procedure of higher diplomatics, would be to wait until M. Poyère's back was turned, giving the majority the needed opportunity to spike the minority's guns.

This was done, and the land forces received their orders to assume the offensive the same evening that Sheila registered at the Hobart. They were commanded to achieve a victory or to perish in the attempt within the sixty hours more or less, which remained before the sailing of "Quinn's" steamer. Moreover, the members of the land forces were commanded to search thoroughly every scrap of the enemy's effects, to confiscate all papers, plans, documents, drawings, chemical calculations and notes discovered therein, and to send two of their captains with the same immediately to Great Headquarters. And further, after the battle, the cadaver of the enemy was to be similarly searched and the fruits of the search likewise were to be rushed to Great Headquarters.

The significance of these orders is obvious. The majority intended to play M. Poyère's hand for him.

When Sheila and her stalwart innocents from Elderton's stepped unwittingly into no man's land, the battle was already raging furiously. In distant New York, unknown to the foreign legions of the majority, the land forces of M. Poyère were pushing a vigorous attack against an enemy whose existence the majority did not suspect. Barton was the object of this new offensive. M. Poyère had not confided his suspicions

concerning this able young chemist to the friends of France, preferring to keep that phase of the campaign in his own hands. Barton was slated for essentially the same treatment as Quayle. His person and papers were to be scientifically searched for useful information. Then he was to suffer elimination.

At this moment the chemist was fighting with his back to the wall, and he knew it. So far, by the sheer superiority of his brilliant intellect, he had held his numerous foes at bay. Should Barton be overcome, the civilization which Cutts, the majority and M. Poyère ostensibly were fighting to preserve, each in his own way, would stand an excellent chance of being saved à la Cutts by M. Poyère. By a strange turn of the wheel, Barton, the true enemy of civilization, was now thrown forward as its last hope. Should M. Poyère succeed in vanquishing the desperate chemist the rest of the world might well despair. Its peace, its prosperity, its happiness would depend on the whim of a single nation.

While Barton parried the thrusts of M. Poyère's agents in New York, the land forces of the majority launched their first terrific assault in Melbourne.

Sheila had gone to her room, three doors north of David's. It was too late in the evening to begin her overtures. She was about to retire when a soft tap on her sitting room door sent her heart bounding. Opening the door she saw one of Elderton's men. At a gesture from the detective she let him in and hastily closed the door.

"Well?" she choked.

"King is out. There are men hiding in his room."

"Oh," she gasped, unable to speak coherently.

"Things look pretty bad," the detective continued. "Why not call the police? Those men in King's room have no business there. If they are arrested for burglary it will put six out of the way for a while at least."

"Six?" she stammered.

"Yes. Six. King is a strong man; but six men is a pretty big order to take on all at once. Those men carry knives. Better let me call the police."

Sheila did not lose her head. If she permitted the police to enter the fight it would mean delays, explanations, investigations. David would be held as a witness. Whatever was done to help him must be done privately. She suspected Elderton's of deliberately seeking to entangle "King"—or "Quinn"—in legal proceedings in order that the Australians might have a further opportunity of trying to discover the location of the new goldfields. For all she knew—and it was indeed probable—the Australian Commonwealth was paying Elderton's to trap King, or at least to ascertain by all legal means available the whereabouts of his great find.

"Don't call the police," she said. "I have a better plan. Is the hall empty?"

The detective cautiously assured himself that the field was free.

"What now?" the detective queried.

"One of you must stay here to warn Mr. King if he comes in while I am gone. The others can follow

me. I am going out on the street to wait for him."

"So you do know him pretty well," the man remarked significantly, confirming Sheila's suspicions that Elderton's agency was more interested in Quayle's goldfields than it was in her safety.

"Yes, if you must know," she replied indifferently. "You would find it out presently, so I may as well tell you now. I have known Mr. King for several years. We are engaged to be married. Does that satisfy you?"

The detective was completely taken aback.

"You know all about his prospecting?" he blurted out.

"I know nothing about Mr. King's private life in Australia. All I know is that he is being hounded by your men and by these others unjustly." She played a bold hand. "Isn't it rather small to persecute a man simply because he has been lucky in mining? Believe me, I know Mr. King well enough to be sure that he will never tell you where his goldfields are. If you tear him to pieces you will never get that information out of him. You have heard what he said in Sydney when the judge dismissed his case? Did that sound like the brag of a weakling? It did not, and you know it. Why don't you play fair with him? If you can convince him that his native friends on the fields will come to no harm, he may tell you where he got all his gold. If you can't convince him, then you don't deserve to know."

The detective stood chewing his heavy mustache

in embarrassed silence. Finally he chanced a speciously frank question.

"Will you say on your honor that you don't know where King got his gold?"

"On my honor I know nothing about it."

Her manner may have convinced him. At any rate he judged that it would be better policy to humor her. By earning her gratitude he might gain a hint or two which no amount of spying could elicit from this self-possessed young woman.

"I believe you," he assured her as if he meant it. "What can we do to help you, Miss Cutts? We are paid to do so, you know."

"If you and the rest will do what I ask I will see that you get a bonus of five hundred pounds each. My yacht will be here early tomorrow morning. You must help me to get Mr. King safely aboard when it anchors. Till then you must do everything in your power to keep these others off. I am going out now to see that he stays in some safer place till the yacht comes. Have you any suggestions?"

The detective considered.

"Really, Miss Cutts, the only safe place I know is in the jail. I'm serious. If I were in King's shoes I should ask to be locked up till my steamer sailed. Why not try it? The Chief will see to it if you ask him."

She searched his face.

"Why not take him to your office till my yacht comes?"

"That would be better than the streets or a hotel,"

he admitted. "But really, Miss Cutts, I don't believe you appreciate how serious the situation is. There are scores of these spies after your man. Why? It beats us. All we know is that they are up on their job and a hard lot. In your case I should take the jail. They can't get in there."

"I'll think it over. Now, will you stay here as I suggested, and tell the others to follow me out of the hotel? I must see Mr. King alone."

"Very well, Miss Cutts. Give me about five minutes to tell the others."

Sheila slipped noiselessly down the corridor. Outside the door of Quayle's room she stopped and listened intently. A subdued sound of stealthy cutting was just audible. She guessed what was happening. Someone in that room was hacking the lining out of a travelling bag with a knife. The spies were systematically rifling the absent man's effects. Quayle had in fact bought a travelling bag and some shirts after purchasing his ticket.

At this moment, in obedience to orders from overseas, the land forces were diligently searching for papers of any description and finding precisely nothing but leather and canvas. Their defeat however did not daunt them. They trusted that their brave comrades of the main army, at present bivouacked in dark nooks all around the hotel environs, would have greater success when they came to rifle the enemy's corpse. Secure in the belief that their fellow warriors could successfully repel any threatened invasion by the enemy, they botched away rather clumsily at their job.

They had not the slightest fear of interruption, for the grand offensive precluded the possibility of the enemy ever again climbing a flight of stairs. It was thus that Sheila overheard the secret skirmish—a mere trench raid, as it were—before continuing on her silent way downstairs and out of the hotel.

The street was deserted, because any street which is to be the scene of a well-conceived murder should be deserted. Sheila strolled back and forth, a block either way, frequently turning round to see whether Quayle was approaching, unconscious that her every step was being watched by twenty pairs of eyes. Her own forces, the five men from Elderton's, had slipped out of the hotel by a side door, and were now concealed in the blackest shadow against a wall in the alley south of the hotel. In that shabby quarter of the city the streets were but poorly lighted, and the alleys gaped invitingly—to assassins—at frequent intervals in almost total darkness.

As the minutes dragged by her suspense became all but unendurable. Fifteen minutes passed, twenty, thirty. The clock on a neighboring church struck ten. The last thin tinkle dwindled into the cold silence, and still there was no sign of Quayle. Had he been waylaid? Why couldn't he have come back at a decent hour, wherever he had gone, instead of roaming the streets all night? Sheila began to long to scold him. Then, she reflected, he was lucky to be out while those six in his room were burglarizing his luggage. At last a rapid step approached from far off up the street. At first she thought it was his. Long before it reached

her she knew her mistake. David had walked like that once, but not now. What had taken the spring out of his step? This walk was like a boy's: David's, when he passed out of the courtroom in Sydney, was that of a middle-aged man. She was crying when the young man overtook her, ventured a coarse witticism and passed on, whistling a music-hall tune. The jolly blackguard entered the hotel.

Presently he emerged, to be followed shortly by three men, stockier than himself, all powerfully built. Luckily the quartette turned down the street, away from her. In a moment she heard her own name whispered as she passed the alley.

"Miss Cutts! We are here. Come with us."

Without a quiver of fear she followed Elderton's men rapidly down the pitch black alley.

"Your friend is at another hotel," the leader explained. "Our man on the second floor got it when that young fellow was let into King's room. King must suspect. He won't be back at the Hobart, or I know nothing."

"Where is he?"

"The Wellington—one of the best in town."

"Those men are going there now?"

"We think so. Come on! We can hop a cab in the next street."

They arrived at the Wellington well in advance of the main army.

"What now?" the leader of Elderton's men inquired.

"I must speak with Mr. King at once."

"His name won't be King, here," the detective re-

marked. "Nor Quinn, either, if I know anything. He knows they're after him."

"What can I do?" she asked in desperation.

"Leave it to me."

The detective went up to the desk.

"I'm from Elderton's," he informed the clerk, and proceeded to give a rapid, accurate description of Quayle. "Know him?"

The clerk nodded.

"Which is his room? We're not going to arrest him, or raise a scandal. Better tell us if you don't want a row on your hands."

The clerk looked stubborn.

"What's the trouble?"

"None of your business. I am a police officer. Call this man to the telephone, or go up and get him. If you don't I'll send you to the station. Hurry!"

The clerk telephoned, and got no reply.

"Take us up," the detective ordered. "Bring your pass key. If that won't work we shall pry open the door with a fire axe."

The room was at the end of a short "L," the only one in that particular passage. They had the place to themselves. It was just the room that a man being pursued by crooks should not have chosen.

Failing to get a response to his persistent knocking on Quayle's door, the detective strode down the hall, smashed the cabinet containing the implements for use in case of fire, seized the axe, and made for the door. The pass key had proved useless, as the occupant of the room had left his own key in the lock. Before

forcing the door, the detective listened intently. There was no sound. The lock was easily burst, and the door swung open, revealing a room in total darkness.

"Now, Miss Cutts," the detective ordered, "speak up. I'm not going in there to get a bash on the head. He will know your voice."

"David?" she choked.

There was no answer.

"Don't you recognize my voice? We have come to help you."

An uncanny silence greeted her announcement. With a sinking heart she entered the room and groped for the switch to turn on the electric light. That Quayle was probably in the room seemed reasonable, as his key had prevented the detective from using the pass. What Sheila expected to see she had not the courage to confess to herself. Had his enemies entered by a window and knifed him in his sleep?

The sudden glare of the electric light revealed Quayle standing tense and rigid in the middle of the room, a heavy chair grasped in his knotted hands ready to repel attack.

Sheila tried to speak, failed, and tottered toward him. He caught her in his arms just as she was about to fall. The feel of her warm, limp body in his arms, and the scent of her hair as it brushed his face when he bent over her stabbed him like a knife. All the perverse futility of his sullen rage against her mocked him in one parting, bitter throb, and fled forever. He knew now that he had never ceased loving her, and

that he must continue to love her till the end of his life, whether or not she knew what her father had done.

"Oh, let the cursèd past go!" he muttered, easing her into a chair. "Leave us!" he snapped at the detective.

"All right," the man replied. "Only get it over in a hurry. You're being followed, you know. Better clear out of here."

Her first thought was for his safety.

"Who are these men hounding you?"

"I don't know. They probably hope to get a map off me of my goldfields. They shan't, because I haven't got one."

"The detectives say they are not Australians."

He received this information in uneasy silence. What could it mean? Cutts again?

"David," she continued, "Barton and my father are using your invention."

"How do you know?" he demanded, suddenly going cold. Was she after all her father's daughter, and were these ruthless pursuers creatures of Cutts', unleashed to attempt murder a second time?

"My father's mind is unbalanced. He confessed something to the doctor, and the doctor guessed the rest."

"What did he guess?"

"That Barton and my father robbed you."

"Barton!" Quayle laughed bitterly. "Friendship is certainly a rare experience, as the philosophers say. Well," he added savagely, "I promise you Barton

won't rob me of my invention. I know a way of stopping him."

"I will help you. Unless you let me do something to make up for what my father did to you, I shall die of shame."

Words failed him for the moment. What did she know? Had her father confessed?

"Did the doctor tell you anything?" he asked uneasily.

A cold shadow seemed to have fallen between them.

"No," she answered. "Nothing that matters."

Contrary to his anticipation, the knowledge that she was ignorant of what her father had done did not obliterate the cold shadow. He stifled a sigh. All their lives they must live with this spectre dividing their secret thoughts, chilling their intimacies.

The detective returned to urge them to hasten.

"This place isn't safe, Mr. King. Better come to our office for a spell."

"Who are these men shadowing me?" Quayle asked, as they entered the lobby.

The man from Elderton's shrugged his shoulders.

"We don't know. If it were a time of war I should say they were high-grade spies of the enemy. Take it from me, Mr. King, they're a tough lot. They will stop at nothing."

"So I have noticed," he remarked grimly, and walked over to the desk to settle his bill and pay for the damage to the door.

Rejoining Sheila he walked out to the street, content

to follow the detective's advice and take refuge at least temporarily in some less dangerous place. The Elderton man walked just behind them. Outside they found four others waiting to escort them to the office. The third and fourth of these were about to follow the others into a roomy cab when, glancing back toward the hotel, they saw six well-dressed men hurrying from the exit. Before the driver could step on the gas in response to a shout from Quayle, a heavy-handled knife flashed through the air and buried its blade almost to the hilt in the chauffeur's right shoulder.

Spies boiled out from everywhere. One of Elderton's men leapt to the driver's seat and started the cab. Four of the attackers rushed the car, jerked open the doors, and tumbled in on Sheila, Quayle, and the two of Elderton's men who had already climbed in. The shrill treble of police whistles added to the din of shouts, blows and curses as the attackers held back night-watchmen, Elderton's two, bystanders mobilized from nowhere, and the police.

Inside the lurching cab a terrific, indiscriminate mêlée with knives, blackjacks, fists, boots and brass knuckles impartially inflicted casualties on friend and foe alike. Sheila was torn from Quayle, whom she vainly tried to protect with her own body, and trampled underfoot. It was probably the safest thing that could have happened to her.

Elderton's men quickly grasped the fact that their assailants had no firearms. As originally planned the

battle was to have been swift, noiseless and safe. A revolver shot is a call to the police; a blackjack or a stiletto is as silent as a maiden's prayer.

Unlimbering their automatics the two detectives took their brutal beatings and savage gashings with heroic stoicism, waiting the inevitable opportunity to press a muzzle against a body and pump the trigger.

A quick succession of shots ripped out, deafening the occupants of the cab who could still hear. Two of the attackers crumpled and wilted in a gushing mass of blood on Sheila. Quayle smashed the third in the face: an automatic finished him. The detective who had fired stiffened with a grunt as a blackjack slapped over his skull with a sickening thud. The fourth and last of the attackers succeeded in blackjacking Quayle with a glancing, ill-aimed blow before the Elderton man who could still fight shot the ruffian through the head. The detective and Sheila alone were conscious when the cab crashed into a lamp post and stopped with a splintering smash.

In the street the land forces of civilization were fighting stubbornly to the last man. Soldiers and fighters all, they were obeying orders to the last letter. To be taken alive meant the black cap, ten feet of rope and the trapdoor. The police shot them down like mad dogs, for the losers put up a vicious, efficient fight. If they must die they would see their slayers in hell first, as demanded by the ethics of their profession.

Sheila lay bruised and stunned, but not seriously injured. Quayle slumped over in a heap on the seat,

the blood streaming from a gash on the back of his head. The last detective retained just sufficient command of his senses to instruct the police to rush Quayle and Sheila to the city jail and lock them up for safety. Then he collapsed, done up by the loss of blood from half a dozen gashes on his face, arms and chest. He had earned the bonus which Sheila promised him.

The attack had failed. Seeing their prey about to escape, the land forces had but one resource. Their strictest orders commanded them to destroy the enemy; the search of the enemy's corpse was merely a secondary objective to be attempted only after the other had been successfully attained.

When the battle opened it looked as if most of the attackers stood a fair chance of retreating in good marching order. Their fast automobiles stood waiting within easy hail. Only the stubborn resistance of Elderton's men, necessitating the full deployment of those land forces then present on the field to prevent a flank attack, turned all but certain victory to disastrous defeat.

There still remained elsewhere in the city at least four complete corps, each of fighting strength equal to that which the police had wiped out. But these, if they were to snatch victory from defeat, must batter down the solid Melbourne jail, where the enemy, Quayle, lay unconscious with a slight concussion of the brain.

Thus, for the moment at least, the majority had lost. M. Poyère, the intransigent minority, still had a chance of winning. A naval engagement, not a

land battle, was to decide the fate of civilization, France and himself.

There remained the apparently negligible chance that Poyère would suffer a defeat at sea. As a matter of fact the massed naval strength of the majority was patrolling the Pacific with the avowed purpose, fully known to Poyère, and officially accepted by him with gratitude, also official, of co-operating with him to the limit of its resources; and precisely therein lay M. Poyère's gravest danger.

As he paced the steel decks of his swift gray battle-cruiser under a blistering sun, M. Poyère began to sweat, and that not merely from the excessive heat. He wished that he had devised some way of setting his alleged allies, the majority, onto Barton's trail should he himself be unsuccessful at sea. Almost in a panic he saw Barton, the dissolute, cynical companion of many a debauch, firmly enthroned as despot of the world's destinies. Why in the name of diplomacy, he asked himself, had he not done this, that, or the other? Now that it was too late he thought he saw at least three ways whereby he might have removed the last element of doubt from his campaign against Barton. Poor M. Poyère was having a bad fit of nerves. Well, he reflected philosophically, it is always darkest just before the dawn.

As if to confirm the truth of this comforting conclusion, the wireless operator handed M. Poyère a long message in code from one of his private generals in Melbourne. The message gave a clear account of the

land attack by the forces of the majority, and stated that it had resulted in total disaster to the attackers.

M. Poyère supplied the missing background without the slightest exertion of his experienced mind. In seeking to cheat him, he saw at a glance, his allies had got the worst of the encounter. A naval ambush, as he had counselled, was to be the ultimate arbiter of the world's fate. For the moment he almost forgot the unpleasant possibilities with regard to Barton. The decision on the sea, he sagely anticipated, could not now be long delayed, and he was prepared to the last gun and the last man.

CHAPTER XIX

S. O. S.

QUAYLE's injuries were distressing but not dangerous. All night long he tossed and muttered in his stupor, while Sheila sat by his couch in the governor's parlor at the jail, and the prison doctor looked in hourly to see how the patient was progressing. The concussion of the brain was but slight, being just severe enough to cloud his mind and prevent him from sinking into a healthy, natural sleep. According to the doctor, the patient would probably recover completely within twelve hours, after a short spell of nausea and a deep sleep. In the meantime there was nothing to be done but to keep him as quiet as possible and change the ice packs on his head.

As she watched hour after hour by the tormented man, Sheila could not help overhearing his disjointed fragments of sentences. She tried not to listen, feeling that in his irresponsible state Quayle might unconsciously betray his secret, whatever it might be. As the night wore on and the comfortless dawn fingered at the barred windows, the sick man seemed to grow worse: he was aware of Sheila's presence, although he did not realize that his companion was she. Frequently rising on his elbow to a half-sitting posture,

he tried to see her face with eyes that swam, muttering incoherently a name that sounded like "Plato."

"Don't you know me?" she whispered. "I am Sheila. I have come to help you. David, you must remember me. . . . Never mind now. Lie back and don't try to think."

At sunrise he became suddenly worse. In alarm Sheila called the doctor.

"He is recovering, Miss Cutts," the doctor reassured her. "For an hour or two he may be quite ill. Then he will fall asleep from exhaustion and wake up better. There is no cause for anxiety. I will send in a trusty to help you take care of him."

Between violent fits of nausea Quayle poured out a dry torrent of withering invective and hopeless, fierce despair. Not having the clue to his jumbled memories, Sheila could make nothing of them, grasping only the reiterated fact that he was burning up with thirst. She tried to give him a drink, but could not. Each time she brought the glass to his lips he became violent and dashed it from her hand. She appealed to the trusty, a strongly built man who happened to be sojourning in the jail pending his second trial on a charge of robbery with violence. Swaying back and forth on his elbow like a drunkard, Quayle studied the glass in the man's hand. The hairy, muscular fingers seemed to fascinate him. Clumsily he managed to touch the hand holding the glass.

"Plato," he muttered, and accepted the drink at once.

Sheila shivered, why, she could not tell. That

David should take from a criminal what he refused from her was not the unkindest cut. David was irresponsible, and did not recognize her. To hold a delirious man accountable for his actions, she admitted, would be foolish and inhuman. Nevertheless, as the Spanish say, only jealous women, angry children and drunkards ever betray their real feelings. Unconsciously she suspected the cold truth. Although she had found David in the body she was yet to meet him in the spirit.

To the pathetic categories of the Spanish proverb should be added that of the ailing. In sickness a man reveals his true character. The sweet appear sweeter, the bitter more bitter. Sheila's subconscious mind, fingering over the dry relics of a cruel betrayal, met that of her lover on the desolate beaches and dry watercourses of his hellish marches. Neither mind in its waking state saw the full countenance of the other; only in the unguarded moments of sleep or delirium was face turned to face and eye to eye. Yet, although the censor permitted none of the truth to pass his jealous watch the mere effort at repression cast its baleful shadow on their waking thoughts. The spectre which divided their love still lay between them. Till the ends of their lives, whether they became one as man and wife or drifted apart unreconciled, that chill presence must separate them in spite of themselves, unless the whole hideous truth which made them aliens were once and for all raised from the dead, dismembered, and reinterred by mutual, understanding consent.

As the doctor had prophesied, Quayle passed into a profound sleep after his violent sickness. His last incoherent words before he slept were almost clear, all but comprehensible.

" 'The Sea is His,' " he began, " 'and He made it' . . . Hell! I shall unmake it!"

Sheila strained every nerve to understand, and failed. What was the meaning of this flaming tirade which the sick man launched against an unseen sea? He seemed to be living again some terrible experience which he would willingly forget, but which he must carry with him to his grave.

" 'I am the Captain of my fate,' " he muttered, as if to reassure himself that a lie might conceal some higher, unhuman truth. "Do you hear, you . . . waves? You cut me off now. . . . For every drop of drink you lying waves deny me I shall exact the ransom of a nation. . . . What are all their guns and rubbish against my weapons? Nothing! What are the sinews of war the politicians blabber about? What? I have hamstrung them all!"

He sank back exhausted, just as the clear yellow rays of the young sun fretted the grills of the window to pale gold. Sheila sent the trusty out to find the doctor.

"He will sleep now, Miss Cutts," the doctor assured her. "When he wakes up he will be better. Why not lie down yourself?"

"I must see to something," she murmured, brushing past him.

As she hurried to the harbor the thought came over

her like an icy cloud that David had not kissed her. Although he had taken her in his arms when she all but fainted in his room at the hotel, his lips had not touched hers. They were together, she reflected bitterly. Together, yes; yet farther apart than ever.

The yacht had arrived during the night. Sheila found the Captain waiting for her at the harbor office. She told him of the attack and of Quayle's injury.

"Better get him aboard the yacht as soon as he can walk," the Captain advised. "You say he bought his steamer ticket for Saturday afternoon?"

Sheila nodded.

"I am determined he shall not take that steamer," she said firmly. "After what happened here the yacht seems the only safe place. Can we make the voyage to San Francisco as fast as the mail steamer?"

"It can't be done. What's the rush?"

"None, that I know," she replied. "Still, I thought David might object if the yacht is much slower than the steamer."

Sheila knew well enough why Quayle was hastening to America. He would at least recover the stolen invention from her father, whether or not he intended using it for himself. After his taste of civilization in Melbourne she would not greatly censure him whatever he made of his invention.

"Will you want me to fetch him down to the launch?" the Captain asked.

"Yes, and bring all of the crew who can leave the yacht. There is no telling what may happen after last night."

At four o'clock that afternoon, about two hours after Quayle awoke, better, Sheila got him safely aboard the yacht. He was still dazed, but had sufficient command of himself to know what was happening. With Sheila he agreed that a passage on the mail steamer would be too hazardous. One or two of his enemies aboard could do the work of a dozen ashore. To board the steamer, he guessed, would be equivalent to committing suicide. In this he was right, for although badly mistaken on some matters of detail, M. Poyère was a strategist who never did things by fractions.

To Sheila's bold suggestion that they proceed immediately to San Francisco, Quayle in his stunned condition offered no objection. Her revelations, if correct, that Barton was involved in the theft of his invention put a new and fouler face on the robbery. No one knew better than Quayle what might overtake civilization should Barton's loose living finally overmaster his wary intellect and trip his unguarded tongue.

While playing the hermit in Sydney harbor Quayle's one thought had been his revenge. The wholesale destruction of civilized society as at present constituted was both his shining day-dream and a black beast that rode him. Sheila's hint flashed across the sombre heavens of his thought like forked lightning, etching in a glaring relief the sheer evil and the stark stupidity of his contemplated revenge. To destroy the world is one thing; to be a passive witness to its destruction is another. Quayle began to waver. Knowing what

the dissolute Barton might unwittingly let loose, Quayle now saw himself in the light of a possible victim, suffering helplessly with hundreds of millions betrayed like himself. The naked vision all but restored his sanity. Not quite, however; hatred is the last love that the human heart relinquishes. Only by much bitter brooding and sane, clear thinking in solitude could he win his way back to a wholesome outlook on life and to the full renunciation of his melodramatic, selfish revenge. For the present he saw clearly but one indisputable fact: Barton, the libertine, at large and in possession of the invention, was a danger which must be checked immediately. So when Sheila proposed that they lose not an hour in returning to America, he readily acquiesced.

Sheila's entry into the problem, and the grudging admission that he still loved her better than his own life, more dearly even than his ambition, were now sharply realized as complications which, until now, he had not dared to face. Already the least spectacular features of his repayment of the banker began to look childish and trivial beside the happiness that might be his for the taking—if only he could grasp it. What perversity restrained his hand?

Too tired to think his way out of the hopeless muddle of his revenge, his ambition and his love, he dropped off to sleep, just as the *Sheila* glided into motion and slipped from the harbor, out to the broad ocean, like a ship in a dream.

Neither Captain nor crew saw anything more significant than a commonplace coincidence of time and

tide in the circumstance that the foreign battle-cruiser, ominous and gray, which happened to be anchored in the harbor about a mile from the *Sheila*, presently steamed out to sea, overtook the yacht, and raced full speed to the northeast. She also was bound for San Francisco, they guessed, or at least for Samoa.

That night the drowsy wireless operator on the yacht, nodding in his chair with the receivers over his ears, almost woke up and took an interest in the ceaseless gossip of the seas. The air bristled with short, sharp splinters of messages in code.

"Naval maneuvers," he muttered, dozing off.

The second officer, standing his watch on the bridge came to a similar conclusion. Being a professional sailor he was more puzzled at what he heard than was the landsman wireless operator. More than once he could have sworn that he detected the steady whir of steam turbines racing at full speed less than a mile away in the darkness. Yet he could make out no ship's light, either green or red. Whatever was plunging through the velvet night was breaking the rigid law of the sea. Only in time of war, and that in hostile waters, do ships proceed at full speed through the dark with all lights out. The puzzled officer also concluded that the high admirals of some Power with a passion for "preparedness" were testing the efficacy of their paper plans by the stale old game of chasing bogeys in the dark. He recalled that on the rush from Sydney to Melbourne the *Sheila* had met or overtaken no fewer than eight assorted war vessels.

"Naval maneuvers," he remarked to the binnacle,

and telephoned for the *Sheila's* searchlight to pick up their neighbor.

The searchlight was a mere toy as such things go. Nevertheless within five minutes it had found its nearest mark. A speedy little devil of a torpedo boat, gray as a woodlouse, was cutting circles across the *Sheila's* course. This friendly little fiend, caught in its indecent act, at first took not the slightest notice of the *Sheila's* feeble searchlight, but continued wheeling as if to circumnavigate the yacht. Presently changing its mind under the prying light, it veered suddenly and shot off on a straight course to the North, like a guilty cockroach fleeing for a crack.

The officer in command of the *Sheila* let the little brute go. The searchlight was doused. It was no business of a mere private citizen how the admirals chose to amuse themselves in the dark.

An hour later, just as he was about to go off watch, the second officer's guess at naval maneuvers was happily confirmed. This time he heard a deeper, stronger whir directly ahead of him in the dark, and distant, he judged, about three miles. Undoubtedly this was a fullfledged battleship blustering into the fray. Before going below he called the Captain's attention to what he heard, and reported the incident of the friendly torpedo boat. The Captain also diagnosed the outbreak as a bad eruption of preparedness—military hives, as it were.

"So long as the fools don't cut us in two in the dark," he concluded, "they can chase each other from Hades to Honolulu and back again for all I care.

Can you beat it? Playing the fool out there in deadly earnest when there isn't a war anywhere in sight. The first thing you know one of those nincompoops will ram another and send him bag, boots and baggage to the bottom. Well, I hope no imaginative idiot mistakes us for the ghost of the *Lusitania.*"

The day that followed was one of those flawless jewels, shot with lustrous greens and blues like a living opal, that visit this earth only on the flowing meadows of the southern seas. Sheila and David drew closer together, united by the peace and wonder of the day, so far from all things gross or human. From hour to hour only the distant smudge of some speedy oil-burner crept for a short spell above the horizon, to dwindle slowly and disappear with the vessel which never showed itself.

To spy openly was unnecessary. Science has endowed the devils of the deep with sharp submarine ears to detect the heartbeats of their prey leagues away. The *Sheila's* every pulse was heard as in a stethoscope. The strong, regular beat of her faultless engines was as carefully followed far below the horizon as if the gray spies had hemmed her in a ring less than a mile wide. The arrow-like course of the yacht, headed straight for Samoa, was plotted in half a dozen steel chart rooms as jealously as if she were the high admiral's flagship of an enemy power.

The unseen shadow between Sheila and her lover all but dissipated in the clear, cool sunshine of that tranquil day, but not wholly. An intangible rift in their happiness still divided them, making them more

like friendly acquaintances than lovers. Sheila found Quayle older than she had known him, and edged with a bitter philosophy which cropped out unconsciously in spite of his efforts to repress it. What he found in her that was strange he made no attempt to analyze. Trusting that time would draw them together he accepted the day for what it was and tried to snatch a fleeting happiness.

About sundown the wireless operator, having enjoyed a soul-satisfying nap unashamed, emerged from his cubby hole to catch a glimpse of the transparent afternoon sunshine. Sheila hailed him.

"Anything exciting on the air?"

"Quite a lot, Miss Cutts," the young man replied as if he had been following it all assiduously for the past eight hours. "There must be naval maneuvers going on all around us. The air is alive with code."

He related his experiences of the night, and they fell to discussing the possibilities.

"I thought the Great Powers had agreed to live together in brotherly love," Quayle remarked with biting sarcasm. "At least that was all the talk when I dropped out of things. Now they're getting ready to jump on each other's backs again. Great world we live in, isn't it?"

Receiving no reply he stared moodily at the deck. Was he glad to be going back to his own people, to the familiar cities teeming with hordes of jaded men and women, each precisely as self-centered as his neighbor? A startlingly clear picture of a muddy

waterhole in a eucalyptus grove leapt upon his retina, and he saw, as vividly as if the bushman stood before him on the deck, Plato timidly regarding him in the fresh, cool air of an undefiled dawn.

Looking up he saw the wireless operator just disappearing into his cabin. He and Sheila were alone.

"Tell me," she whispered, laying a hand on his arm. "It will help you."

"Tell you what?" he countered, taken off his guard.

"What did my father do to you?"

"Oh, that," he laughed shortly. "Please forget it. What's the use of digging up the past?" Seeing the hurt look in her eyes he became gentler. "I'm sorry, Sheila. I didn't mean it that way. Isn't it enough that we are together? Haven't I got you again? That's all that matters. I'll forget it if you will. Why, I had forgotten all about it until you spoke," he lied, trying to ease her distress. "Make it a bargain; I'll never allude to anything that happened in Australia if you do the same. Is it a go?"

She nodded miserably, secretly convinced that until they talked it all out once neither of them would ever forget. To the end of their days they must remain strangers. In his present mood it would be disastrous to urge him to share the memory that had seared him for life. Praying that some unforeseen opportunity would give her the chance denied now, she bided her time and tried to think she was happy.

Quayle stole a glance at her as she stood by the rail gazing at the vast disc of the sun about to plunge

beneath the far, flowing green of the horizon. His conscience accused him of unfairness, and for one black moment he almost wished that she had not found him. Then, in contrition at his churlish ungraciousness, he felt that he at least owed her some assurance that he would not make her life hell on earth by dragging Cutts through the mire in public.

"Sheila," he began, "you said the other night at the hotel that Barton has stolen my invention. Are you sure?"

"I have no proof," she admitted, "yet I could swear that it is so. Burdette, I see now, has practically told me."

"Burdette is your father's physician?"

"Yes, the alienist to whom my father confessed. I had suspected my father's sanity, and called in Burdette as a specialist in mental disorders."

"Overwork," Quayle commented briefly. "Before I left your father was all upset about his European loans. Although he would not admit as much to me, I saw pretty plainly he was in a tight place."

She thanked him with her eyes and her lips.

"I understand," she said softly. "But remember, David, whatever comes of it all, I am on your side, and only on your side, body and soul. If a man cannot serve two masters, neither can a woman."

"You shan't suffer," he returned hastily, hiding his face in shame. "Did you think I would do anything to hurt you? No," he hurried on, "Barton is the man I'm after. He must be stopped. You will see why when I tell you what my invention is, and what it

can do. Until I tried it out in Sydney harbor I did not know myself how appallingly drastic it is."

"You need not tell me unless you wish."

"But I must. If you understand what I have done it will help you to reach a fairer verdict on your father. After all, Sheila, he is your father, and he was always kind to you. To a man with his outlook on life I see now that my invention could only seem utterly devilish. To repress it your father would be justified in doing everything in his power."

"Even murder?" she asked quietly.

"He has committed no murder so far as I know."

"But he tried," she persisted. "You think he would be justified even in that?"

"Yes," he answered boldly. "Ethics are relative. You cannot justify this or that as a thing in itself, but only in reference to other things. Your father took the part of the world against the individual. Even you must grant that the happiness of hundreds of millions is cheap at the price of one man's life."

"You can get the best of me in an argument," she replied with a truly feminine touch, "but you can't convince me."

Quayle laughed joyously. After all Sheila was only flesh and blood. It was the first real intimacy he had experienced since their reunion.

"Now," he continued, "I'm going to explain my invention, not to make my point—which you have admitted in spite of yourself—but to prove to you that unless we stop Barton we ourselves may as well

say goodbye to civilized life. We shall be crushed along with the rest."

Briefly and clearly he sketched the story of his master invention, describing in detail its probable effects, should it ever become public, on all civilization as commonly understood.

"Now Barton," he concluded, "is in my opinion the ablest chemist living. It will be nothing for such a man to restore the details which I omitted—deliberately—from my specifications. Barton is the most dangerous man I ever knew. He gets too fond of too many women, and that's fatal when a man must keep a secret. In a few years he will lose his grip, and his control of his tongue when half-drunk will become less perfect. Then the devil will be out. Some bright morning he will wake up to find his latest mistress gone with the secret he spilled the night before when he was drunk and loving. Then we all of us, you and I with the rest, may as well pack our blankets and hit the short trail to the simple life. This is precisely what will happen unless we can squelch Barton before he gets well started."

"And after that?" she suggested softly.

"How can I tell?"

"You yourself will use the invention?"

Quayle evaded the direct question.

"I shall keep it in my own hands."

"But if it should be stolen again?"

"Then," he laughed shortly, "the world will be in for at least a hundred years of anarchy and chaos. Civilization may well go under for good and all long

before the end of the present century. Then the survivors will have to begin all over again and make a better job of it than we have done. However, enough of that. Now let me tell you a little of what I learned from the black fellows who washed out all that gold for me," and suddenly changing the subject, Quayle described his life in the bush with his primitive friends.

"Civilized men," he concluded savagely, "are not fit to live compared to those bushmen. We whites do not begin to get the fun out of life that those black fellows get. We are stale and bored. A twelve course banquet, all the luxury of this millionaire's yacht, aren't in it with a handful of roots and grubs when you have a real appetite. Half the day we stupefy ourselves with overfeeding, and sleep it off the rest. Those fellows enjoy every hour of the twenty-four. Let one of them decide whether civilization is worth saving. If you can't guess his verdict, I can."

"You are just like a nice little boy, David," Sheila remarked sweetly. "I know what's the matter with you. It's half past seven and you want your dinner. Come along."

They found the hungry Captain impatiently awaiting their arrival in the saloon. From their excited voices which had drifted in from the deck, he inferred that the young people were enjoying a lovers' quarrel. A cargo of wildcats, he reflected, would be pleasanter company than a gross or two of engaged couples. The meals, at any rate, would be on time.

The poor Captain was destined to go without his

dinner. Just as Sheila took her seat the wireless operator rushed in to call the Captain.

"S. O. S., sir," he panted, and gave the latitude and longitude of the sinking vessel.

"What ship?" the Captain snapped, striding from the saloon.

"No answer. She's evidently going down fast, or her wireless has given out."

"One of those fools has rammed another," the Captain declared disgustedly, climbing onto the bridge. "I knew it would happen. 'Naval maneuvers,' bah! Playing hide and seek in the dark in peace time. Idiots!"

The *Sheila* slewed about on her course and headed full speed for the vicinity of the "wreck" less than five miles to the south. In the dim starlight it was impossible to see any darkened hulk that might be floating helplessly a hundred yards away. The feeble searchlight sweeping back and forth before the scudding yacht picked up nothing as the minutes sped by, and the crew began to despair. Were they too late?

Quayle and Sheila stood well forward, straining their eyes through the dark. Presently Sheila slipped her arm through his and laid a caressing cheek on his sleeve.

"The world isn't such a bad place after all," she whispered. "Here are all these men—the Captain, the engineer, the crew—working like fiends—almost tearing the yacht to pieces—to go to the help of other men they have never even seen. What will they get for it? Nothing but the thanks of our common hu-

manity! God bless science for its wireless, and sailors for their S. O. S.!"

"You don't expect me to endorse all that on an empty stomach, do you?" he laughed good-naturedly. "I thought we were going to have dinner."

"So did I—which reminds me. I must see if the steward is getting a supply of hot coffee ready. Some of the men will probably need it."

She hurried away to supervise operations in the galley, leaving Quayle to help the crew in their orderly work with the lifeboats. Drilled to the last detail they were going about their emergency preparations as coolly as if it were just the perfunctory fortnightly fire and wreck drill. Within five minutes now the *Sheila* should reach the spot of the S. O. S.

A sudden shout from a deckhand on the port side brought the second officer hurrying to the rail.

"She's awash, sir!"

Less than a hundred yards away a single ruby light dipped and vanished behind a crest, only to reappear instantly and as suddenly to disappear. As the *Sheila's* searchlight flickered over the spot a shout of astonishment went up from the bridge.

"A submarine, by God!"

Flopping upside down in the fitful breeze a Union Jack fastened to the forward wireless mast of the submarine signalled the distress of the unfortunate craft.

"A British boat, sir," the second officer shouted up to the Captain on the bridge.

"Lower away!"

The second officer sprang into the swinging lifeboat with its crew, and was lowered swiftly and skilfully to the water. As the boat drew near the submarine two officers emerged from the manhole—a more appropriate designation for the deck opening of a submarine than the correct technical term—and stood waiting on the narrow steel deck for their rescuers to pull alongside.

"What's the trouble?" the second officer shouted from the lifeboat.

The commander of the submarine, a mere boy, looking pale in the glare of the searchlight, shouted back something incoherent that sounded like "dynamos."

The occasion of the submarine's distress was soon ascertained. Her electrical drive, the youthful commander declared, was hopelessly fouled. The cause? The devil only knew. Dishonest work, probably, on the part of the builders. They must continue to float where they bobbed, like a scuttled turtle in a tub, until one of the battle-cruisers turned back to heave them a cable and give them a tow. They couldn't tell whether any of the other vessels of the fleet had heard their distress call. Would the *Sheila* take them in tow until she could summon one of the sub's big devil sisters? Their own wireless, with everything else electrical aboard the blooming tin fish, was out of commission. They could neither steer nor submerge the brute. The only thing to be done was to take the crew aboard the *Sheila,* screw down the lid of the manhole, and let the disabled parasite trail the pretty

little yacht until a real ship should answer the S. O. S. or, providing none responded, until the *Sheila* ignominiously lugged the cripple to a drydock in Samoa.

"You're a British yacht?" the Commander inquired finally, when the first officer agreed to the proposed plan.

"American. The *Sheila,* of New York."

"Just as good," the young Commander replied, with the faintest of un-English accents.

That slight irregularity in the boy's speech passed unnoticed by the officer and crew of the lifeboat in the excitement of the moment.

"Australian?" the officer queried as the Commander tumbled into the lifeboat.

"One of the three submarines the Commonwealth owns," the Commander elucidated with a deprecatory laugh. "Naval maneuvers, and all that sort of bally rot, you know. The battleships are half ours, half England's. Nervous about the Japs, you know. We can't be too careful in time of peace," he confided with garrulous good humor.

"Preparedness, eh?" the officer laughed, as four of the submarine's crew joined their commander in the pitching lifeboat. "All right, boys, pull away. There is enough for one load. We know all about preparedness in the States," he continued. "Yes, it's good stuff. Damned glad I'm not in our Navy."

"It is the life of a dog," the Commander agreed, with a curiously un-English attempt to hit the English idiom. "They send you out to sea in a canful of

junk," (here he did better) "and expect you to swim home."

The Captain personally welcomed the Commander and his four men to the deck of the *Sheila*. In a flash the fishiness of the whole affair struck him like a fist. Would the commanding officer of the disabled vessel have been the first to quit his craft had she indeed been in distress? Suspicion came too late. Before he could draw his own revolver he found himself looking down the barrel of the boyish Commander's automatic.

The naval gentlemen—all boys in their late teens or early twenties, and each a specially picked naval cadet of his glorious country—lost not a second in carrying out their well-prepared plan. That they themselves had not conceived the plan made no difference. They obeyed orders. Four straight shooters armed with automatics are a match for any mob of eight unarmed men. The Captain of the *Sheila* was the one man aboard the yacht who habitually carried fire-arms while on duty, not because he ever expected having to use his gun, but because it was part of an age-old tradition of the sea.

While the commander and three of his men held the crew at bay, the fourth proceeded to the wireless room. With the aid of the fire-axe he quickly demolished the wireless set. The *Sheila* was now reduced to prayer as the only means of summoning help.

Although helpless, officers and crew were not tongue-tied. Disregarding Sheila's presence in the background they blistered the hides off those four

braves of the sea and their young commander. The only weapon the *Sheila's* crew had was strong language, and they did not hesitate to use it. A sudden rush to disarm the pirates—they were nothing less—would have been equivalent to suicide.

"You call yourselves naval men," the Captain flamed, "and hold up an unarmed crew! You must be drunk. Every single one of you will suffer for this as long as you live!"

"We are obeying orders," the Commander retorted frigidly.

"Obeying orders? You'd cut our throats, too, I suppose, if they 'ordered' you to do it? It must have been one of your sort that torpedoed the *Lusitania.* You say you're British. I say you're liars. No white man ever spoke English with a greasy brogue like yours. Get to hell off my deck before I pitch you off!"

The Captain's rage would have been a credit to any human being. It also was foolhardy in the extreme, for it swept the Captain clean off his feet. He lost his head completely. Before Quayle could seize his arm, the Captain had struck the Commander a smashing blow with his fist fairly on the lips. The next instant the Captain pitched forward, shot through the brain.

White with horror at the foul deed the crew shrank back in silence. With a choking sob Sheila knelt by the side of her dead friend. She was not afraid, only degraded. These men were human beings, of the same species as she.

"You coward!" she flung at the Commander.

The automatic trembled for an instant in the Commander's ready hand, as though he were tempted to use it again.

"He attacked me," he answered coldly, restraining himself. "We are only obeying orders." His voice rose a note as he turned to the clustered crew and spoke crisply. "We want an anarchist by the name of David King, who is escaping on this yacht. Give him up."

"King?" the second officer answered. "There is no man by that name on the yacht, and no anarchist!"

"We know he is on this yacht," the officer persisted. "Give him up or we must sink your ship."

"Sink our ship?" the mate echoed, unable to comprehend the sheer insanity of the ultimatum. Do you know what year this is? The war ended in 1918. What in the name of God is the matter with you?"

"Will you give him up? I can't argue. I'll give you two minutes to make up your mind. If you don't surrender him I have orders to sink the yacht."

As he spoke he stretched out his arm and kept an eye on his wristwatch. As the seconds ticked off, the crew furtively eyed the automatics holding them at bay. Each, even the young Commander's, was levelled for instant and effective use. Nevertheless at the minute and a half mark, at a slight nod from the second mate, the crew decided to try their luck. Quayle hurled one man to the deck and got a bullet through his right sleeve for his pains. The total casualties were three killed outright—all of them among the

crew of the *Sheila.* The naval officers still held the deck. The ensuing silence, infinite as the sky, was a horror not to be endured.

"Time's up," the Commander snapped. "Surrender King."

The challenge died on the silent air unanswered, and the Commander turned on his heel. Covering their leader's retreat the four from the submarine followed him over the side into the *Sheila's* lifeboat.

"If you attempt to shoot at us before we submerge," the boyish Commander warned from the pitching lifeboat, "our crew will fire at once. There is a six-inch gun on our forward deck."

"You're going to sink us any way," the second officer scoffed, thinking they had bluffed off the attackers, "so what's the difference?"

"You have time to take to the boats," the Commander said coldly.

"And get blown out of the water later? Is that it?"

There was no reply.

"They mean business," Quayle remarked quietly. "I'm the man they want. Let me take a chance. What's the sense of sending the rest of you to the bottom? Hi!" he shouted after the boat. "I surrender."

"Is King speaking?" the Commander inquired.

"I'm King. If I go with you, you will let the yacht escape?"

"Yes. Our orders are to capture or destroy the anarchist, King."

"All right. Come back and take me off."

"Wait!" Sheila cried. "I am his wife. If he goes, I go too. Unless you take me, he stays here."

There was a short consultation in the lifeboat.

"You may come with him."

Over the protests of the officer and crew, Sheila and Quayle prepared to enter the lifeboat. Quayle did not seek to restrain her.

"It's our only chance," he expostulated to the men. "Miss Cutts insists on coming. If I stay with you everybody is murdered. This way we two may escape, and you certainly do. Sheila, you're white. But will your coming help?"

"What if it doesn't? I shall never be separated from you again."

"I wish I knew what to make of it all," he muttered, as the four young officers pulled for the submarine. "How did they ever track me to Sydney in the first place? And who is at the bottom of it? These boys are neither British nor American."

"They must be insane," she returned in a low tone. "Or drunk."

"Don't you believe it," he retorted savagely. "They may not know why they're doing this, but their superiors do. What lie did they tell these young fools to force them into this dastardly outrage. What's next?"

"Keep your head," she whispered. "Remember, I am with you. That is partly why I came. You must fight to protect me whether you value your own life or not. I'm trusting to your brain to get us out of this."

"After what they did to the Captain and those poor fellows of the crew? What chance have I with nothing but my bare hands?" he scoffed bitterly.

"None," she admitted. "But do nothing rash. Wait."

"I wish I had some chemicals," he muttered.

Aboard the submarine they were hustled aft, as far as possible from the torpedo tubes. Four junior officers were detailed to mount guard over the prisoners and the rest feverishly set about closing down the hatch and preparing to submerge. Frozen with horror Sheila saw the Commander and three of his crew busying themselves about the starboard torpedo tube.

"You promised!" she shrieked, flinging herself on the guards in a futile effort to reach the Commander.

Quayle's attempt to break away proved equally fruitless. As the tanks filled and the evil brute submerged, the prisoners found themselves roped, hand and foot. It all happened swiftly, almost without sequence in time, like the incredible catastrophes of a nightmare. A confused blur of desperate hand-to-hand fighting, the overpowering sense of impotence before overwhelming numbers, the clammy cold of the sweating steel walls, and the short, despairing rebellion was subdued. Dazed and but half conscious the prisoners lay bruised and panting at the feet of their guards. A metallic clang, the sudden whirr of some devilish machinery leaping into life like a crazy clock in a madman's dream, a deafening concussion that jarred the steel plates like the concerted blows

of ten thousand sledge hammers, and the deed passed into secret history.

Nothing of the *Sheila* remained but a rain of splintered steel and wood, some of it stained with a ghastly crimson dew, whipping the black waves to foam.

CHAPTER XX

RENDEZVOUS

QUAYLE retained enough of his sense of justice to place the guilt for the dastardly outrage where it belonged—with the men higher up. For two days and nights he questioned and cross-questioned his captors. What he learned was little enough, but it gave him a glimmer of facts. With Sheila he guessed that someone, probably Barton, had slipped in his misuse of the fatal invention, and that this brutal assault on human decency was civilization's self-defense against the dissolution which threatened it. One significant detail however puzzled Quayle greatly. Why, if the safety of civilization were the one issue, was the inventor not torpedoed with the hapless crew of the *Sheila?*

To solve this puzzle Quayle bent all of his efforts on the youthful Commander and such of the boyish crew as could be induced to defend their deadly "obedience to orders." Quayle was only the more mystified. He still had in his wallet under his shirt the residue of his Sydney fortune in bank notes. When the time seemed ripe he judiciously exhibited this very considerable hoard, only to be met with an indignant stare. These young men, who did not shrink from

the foulest of murders in the name of duty, revolted at the hint of a bribe. Their upright manliness in the face of money was a shining testimonial to their training as officers and their esprit-de-corps.

It was sunset when the murderous submarine slipped noiselessly and unseen into the calm waters of the rocky Samoan baylet. Never was evening more serene or nature more austerely beautiful than at this peaceful hour in that wild spot, miles from the nearest village. The evil brute rose to the surface to rest and take the evening air. At frequent intervals for half-hour stretches all through the day she had skimmed lightly along the surface of the ocean, breathing and exchanging wireless messages with Poyère's cruiser. Hour by hour as she drew near to this calm spot for her rendezvous with her big sister, the sleek submarine had quickened or slackened her speed in obedience to wireless orders from the battle-cruiser, in an intelligent attempt to time the meeting perfectly. Now, as she lay quiescent, her dynamos dead, she knew that she had done her part well, for on the far amber horizon to the west a huge puff of black smoke proclaimed the eager haste of her giant sister.

Quayle and Sheila were permitted to share the narrow steel deck with the Commander and two of his officers. Exhaling the foul, acrid air of their steel prison from their lungs, the captives drew in a full breath of the evening's purity. Was ever any spot on earth more beautiful than this? A blunt headland of white coral, thickly timbered with trees as green as emeralds or as deeply purple as the evening seas,

guarded the eastern entrance, while the western shelved off in terraces of pink coral down to the lazy wash of the waves, where land and ocean melted into one. So near were they to the coral shore that the five on deck distinctly heard the drowsy call of birds seeking their resting places for the night.

Sheila glanced significantly at the shore and raised her eyebrows ever so slightly. Quayle shook his head. Although the flat rocks lay less than a hundred yards away, and both he and Sheila were expert swimmers, he declined the opportunity to "escape." Silently pointing to the two guards and the Commander, he drew Sheila's attention to their right hands, each of which, thrust into the pocket of its owner's jacket, undoubtedly held an automatic. Sheila nodded, and turned her attention to the rapidly growing cloud on the western horizon. What next? she wondered.

Within five minutes darkness must swoop upon them. Just as the last daylight made seeing possible, they saw, within thirty seconds of one another, four prodigious clouds of black smoke mushroom up behind the first, as if in pursuit. M. Poyère was indeed being "escorted" to his rendezvous by the swiftest of his allies.

He had a good lead. Could he maintain it? Through the last of the daylight the silent watchers on the deck of the submarine saw the steel turrets and smokestacks of a huge gray devil of a battle-cruiser leap above the rim of the sea, to be followed almost instantly by its low, long hull. Tearing directly down upon them the menacing war-machine wallowed

low in the troughs and sheared through the rolling ridges like a giant plow gone mad. The furious whirr of her steam turbines and the roar of her overheated furnaces turned the calm little bay into a hell of noise, as night, with one quiet gesture of triumph at the defeated day, descended to reign upon the flowing fields of the unharvested sea.

The Commander of the submarine ripped out a curt order, and the ruby light leapt into life on the forward wireless mast. This was the agreed signal.

"What now?" Quayle muttered.

Sheila pressed his hand.

"Keep your head," she whispered. "We shall escape yet."

The whisper scarcely died upon her lips before all hell seemed suddenly to break loose. There was a crash in the darkness to the west, then another, and two T. N. T. shells shattered the headland. As rod after rod of red fire stabbed the night to the west, and high explosive shells spouted up the water all about the submarine like geysers, the officers and crew of the treacherous submarine knew that now they were themselves betrayed. The high admiral of their own fleet was firing on them!

For a moment they endured their marytrdom in dazed silence. Then the Commander, his bronzed clean-shaven face blood-red and working with passion in the evil glow of the ruby signal, clenched his fist at the darkness in the direction of Poyère's crew and shouted impotently the foulest insults of his native tongue.

Suddenly, as if struck by a new idea, he ceased, jumped to the manhole and yelled a brisk order down to his crew. Two life-belts were thrust up through the manhole. With his own hands the young Commander adjusted Sheila's, while one of his men assisted Quayle. The instant this merciful business was safely concluded, Quayle and Sheila were rudely shoved into the water, on the dark side, away from the bursting shells.

"Swim!" the Commander shrieked. Impotent and about to die himself, he saw that his best revenge was to save the life of the man whose death seemed so vitally important to those who were about to murder himself and his crew.

They needed no urging. Stunned by the terrific concussions as the shells burst in the water, the swimmers floundered in a daze for the low coral ledge to the west of the bay. In ten minutes they reached it, crawled up out of the water, and lay panting. They were free. What of the Commander and his crew?

The moment his prisoners were safely in the water, the Commander gave orders to screw down the manhole and fill the tanks. When Sheila and Quayle searched the darkness for some trace of the ruby light they saw nothing but the rapid, splashing flowers of flame as shell after shell burst where the submarine had submerged. Where was she now? Had she been hit? Shaking themselves together they scrambled up over the ledge to a safer refuge.

As they staggered up to the shattered headland, Quayle and Sheila turned back to gaze at the inferno

of the sea. Shells at the rate of twenty a minute were bursting in crimson and gold over the spot where the submarine had submerged or sunk. But it was no longer there.

Suddenly, even above the crashing pandemonium that had turned the placid evening into an inferno, a shattering roar lifted itself majestically, overpoweringly to the black vault of the heavens, and a red gush of flame pierced the zenith like a sword.

This was no less than the departure of M. Poyère's gray devil from the field of honor. The Commander of the submarine was indeed a picked man, the surest shot with a torpedo tube of all his great and efficient navy. His final effort had caught M. Poyère's steel fortress squarely below her shell-room: and betrayer and betrayed plunged to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean together.

At breakfast the next morning the entire civilized world—all except the few who knew better—exclaimed with horror and pity at the terrible tragedy which had happened off Samoa during the battle-fleet maneuvers of the League of Nations. The finest of all battle-cruisers (the submarine for obvious reasons was not mentioned in the despatches) of Europe had gone the way of glory with her entire crew of officers and men. What was responsible for the disaster? Naval experts differed. They hazarded for the edification of the public, "stale" powder, "rotten" shells, had exploded spontaneously in the magazines of the unfortunate battle-cruiser under the sudden jarring

occasioned by the salvos. An "investigation" was promised. In due time it was held, and resulted in a liberal coat of whitewash for all concerned.

The tragedy of Samoa cleared the international atmosphere like a strong wind. Poyère was eliminated. It was officially accepted as a fact by the majority—at Great Headquarters—that "King" and the deadly invention locked up in his cunning brain had ceased to exist.

As they stumbled through the dark to the nearest highroad, Quayle and Sheila tried to speak, but failed. For an hour or more they reeled along in dazed silence. At last Quayle found his tongue.

"I don't blame them," he muttered. "How the knowledge of my invention has leaked out I don't know. The certainty is that it has. Now they are fighting among themselves to get control of it. Civilization!"

She slipped her arm through his.

"What will you do?" she whispered.

He knew what she meant, but ignored the true import of her question.

"Get to a village and then take a steamer back—to civilization. We are officially dead. You can count on that. It should be easy now."

What he meant by "it" he left to her imagination.

Three days later they were aboard the mail steamer to San Francisco as Mr. and Miss Carruthers of San Francisco. Their water-stained garments were exchanged at the first village they entered for cheap

slops, and these in turn for tourist outfits at the seaport. They passed as a pair of globetrotters bound for home. Nobody pestered them beyond casting sly insinuations in their direction that it was unusual for a brother and sister to be so affectionate.

CHAPTER XXI

UNITED

THE evening that Sheila and Quayle, incognito of course, landed in San Francisco, Sheila hastened by the night train to Pasadena. Before planning the next move she and David must learn exactly how the land lay. Sheila was to confer with the one man she could trust, and the only man who could give her inside information, while Quayle waited for her to rejoin him in San Francisco.

Arriving in Los Angeles she went directly to Burdette's office. The doctor was disengaged and admitted her at once.

"Good afternoon, Miss Cutts, won't you sit down?"

He spoke as unconcernedly as if she were a regular patient just arrived to keep an appointment. Passing behind her to raise the blind, he scanned her profile curiously and searchingly.

"How is my father?" she asked.

Burdette poured out a glass of water from a crystal pitcher on the desk and pushed it toward her.

"You missed my letter," he temporized. "Why did you return so suddenly?"

"I will tell you in a moment. How is my father?"

"You must prepare yourself for bad news."

"Tell me," she said calmly, gripping the arm of her chair. "I am prepared."

"Your father is dead."

"Oh, thank God!"

Burdette was startled out of his habitual composure. Was this the beginning of hysteria?

"In a sense it was a release," he remarked.

"I did not mean that."

She buried her face in the arm of her chair and sobbed as if her heart were breaking. The doctor let her cry it out. At last she gained control of herself and drank the glass of water which he offered.

"Do you wish me to tell you how it happened?" he asked gently.

She nodded, and Burdette went directly to the point.

"It was an accidental death, caused by a fall, the day your second cablegram reached your father." He watched her closely, but she betrayed no emotion. Satisfied that she suspected nothing he continued. "You remember, of course, that you cabled saying David was probably on his way to New York. I tried to reach you by cable in Sydney that night, after I heard of your father's death, but failed. Then I wrote to the post-office there, asking that the letter be forwarded."

"It would not have reached me. But never mind that now. Tell me about my father."

There was a silence. Sheila glanced up suddenly, fixing her eyes on the doctor's.

"Was my father's death accidental?"

"I can only give you my opinion."

"What is it?"

"No!"

"You think he was murdered?"

"Yes. I am morally certain of it."

"By whom?"

"An answer to that question might get me into serious difficulties unless I could back up my suspicions with rigid proof."

"You can trust me," she said bitterly, "even if I am my father's daughter. I shall tell nobody what you say."

"Well then, if you insist upon knowing, your father was killed by Barton the very morning your second cablegram arrived. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of accidental death caused by a fall. If Barton was not responsible for that fall I know nothing of crime or of criminals."

"How did it happen? You need not be afraid of my breaking down. I have been prepared for this. Unless I know everything, once for all, unequivocally and without subterfuge, I shall go mad."

"Yes, a clear understanding will do you good. About six weeks before he was much better, sleeping well, eating heartily, interested in his work at the aquarium, and at last free from the worry which had caused his nervous breakdown. This was borne out by the detailed reports of the nurses. As a concession to his improved health he asked that he and Barton be allowed to work in the aquarium alone, with the nurse within easy call, but not actually in the aquarium.

"Well, I saw no objection. If the nurse were

needed, Barton could call him, and he would be on the spot in thirty seconds. As a matter of fact your father's illness was never of the kind that runs to explosions of physical violence. I gave my consent.

"On the morning of your second cablegram, your father and Barton, after a very early breakfast, went on a tour of inspection of the concrete tanks. These had been practically finished the previous day, and the workmen had left after knocking down the timber forms. The waste lumber, scantling or ordinary siding and ten foot two by fours, was lying stacked against the sides of the big tanks. A new gang was to come the following day to finish the steel work. The tanks were to be roofed over with heavy glass supported on broad steel girders. These girders were already in place, but the riveting was not done. The girders over the largest tanks were about fifty feet long and six feet apart.

"When the nurse rushed in, answering Barton's shout for help, he found Barton on one of the girders and about half way across it. Your father lay doubled up on the concrete floor, thirty feet below the corresponding spot on the neighboring girder, six feet away from Barton's. This was the deepest of all the concrete tanks, as it was intended for the sharks. Your father's neck was dislocated. There were other injuries, but the first had caused his instantaneous death.

"According to Barton he and your father were walking over the girders of the shark tank when your father suddenly became dizzy and fell. Barton saw

him reeling. But as he was six feet away with a thirty foot drop to a concrete floor between his own girder and the next, he could do nothing to save your father.

"The nurse is an able man who has had a great deal of experience with the criminally insane. The violent quarrels between the two men had made him alert. As a matter of routine duty he observed the floor in the vicinity of the body. There was nothing within thirty feet of it, not even a splinter. This testimony came out as a matter of course at the inquest. On its face this was a plain case of death by accident. Your father's previous ill-health was established to account for the dizzy spell.

"My suspicions were confirmed by a private report from your father's executors. I wrote to them directly, requesting advance information on the condition of your father's estate. After the B. F. T. disaster your father's private fortune, outside of real estate and personal property, amounted to about eight million dollars. When he organized the All American Chemical Products Corporation, this eight million began doubling itself every few months. Out of all this vast mass of money about two hundred thousand dollars only was spent on the aquarium so far as it had progressed. A tremendous sum, in fact the total residue of your father's fortune, including deeds to all of his houses and real estate, has been paid over to Barton. Each of those fabulous checks he wrote to Barton bears the memorandum 'for technical services.' Further, all of your father's capital stock in

the All American has gone the same way. It is lucky for you, Miss Cutts, that you have a private fortune, and that your father deeded over all he intended you to have before he went to New York. Thanks to the generous fees he paid Barton 'for technical services' he died practically penniless.

"Those checks of course were a pretty strong hint of blackmail. Barton bled your father so long as there was a drop to bleed. Then he shoved him off that girder with a ten-foot stick of lumber.

"The nurse, as I said, found no lumber within twenty feet of the body. The reason was obvious. After pushing your father to his death with the stick which he had been carrying, Barton walked back to the wall of the tank and dropped it down onto the pile with the rest of the lumber. Your father carried no balance-pole. It was not necessary to do so; the girders were broad, and his head was steady. Barton, however, as I learned from the nurse, occasionally made use of a pole. He is a far-seeing type of criminal, is Barton, and one whom it would be difficult to trap.

"Having disposed of his stick, Barton returned to the middle of his girder and shouted for help. The rest followed inevitably. Given a man of iron nerve and ingratiating personality like Barton's, a sick man like your father who might well be subject to sudden attacks of dizziness, a clean floor and an apparently cleaner lack of motive for murder, given all these, I say, in conjunction with an average coroner and a jury of average intelligence, and a verdict of acci-

dental death was the only one to be reasonably expected.

"Barton's case, I confess, interests me considerably from the professional point of view. The stakes that would tempt an ordinary murderer would not attract him. Quayle's invention must be of unique value. Has he told you its nature?"

"He told me on the yacht soon after we left Melbourne."

"And what is your opinion?"

"It is utterly bad."

"Why, exactly, Miss Cutts?"

"Because it wrecked my father's character and made Barton commit murder. Because it has ruined two men, and I think it is ruining a third."

"David?" the doctor hazarded.

"Yes," she sobbed, breaking down.

"There, there," Burdette comforted. "See if we can't find a way out of it all. What seems to be the trouble? You are overwrought now, with your father's death and one thing or another. Perhaps you exaggerate some imaginary difficulty?"

"I wish I did. I have taken all this horror quietly because it has been a release from torture. Oh, if only you knew what I have been dreading all the way across the Pacific, and what an unspeakable relief it is that my father's death has made it impossible!"

"Never mind it now," he said gently. "It is over. Believe me, Miss Cutts, your future will be nothing like your past."

"If only I could believe that!" she cried, wringing

her hands. "You sent me out to Australia to find David and I found him. Sometimes I wish the yacht had sunk long before I ever reached Sydney. David and I are together, but farther apart than ever."

"Perhaps I can help you if you tell me the trouble."

Bit by bit she recounted the strange story of Quayle's life in Sydney as she knew it, and her first, frustrated attempt to meet him and soften his unnatural hardness. Then, while Burdette sat as quiet as a stone, she told of the attack in Melbourne, of her escape with Quayle, of the torpedoing of the *Sheila,* leading to the tragedy at Samoa. Finally she recounted the significant details of her voyage with her lover across the Pacific, his sudden reticences just when the break between them seemed about to heal, his bitter invectives against civilization, and his moody brooding for hours at a time when nothing she could do seemed capable of rousing him.

"So you see," she concluded, "the invention is utterly bad. If I had not lived through it myself I should never have believed that civilized nations could be so devilish. David guesses that all that slaughter was just an unsuccessful attempt to capture and make a slave of him to run the invention and give the nation owning him supreme power over the whole world. This has made him more bitter than ever, but it is not the root of his troubles. He was all kindness once, now he is hard, except to me. And my father is the cause. Why?"

"When I tell you it must not make you hate your father. He is dead; do not do him an injustice. In

his dealings with David he was temporarily insane. If you hate him you will be worse than he was."

"Tell me. I am ready. What does it matter now what I or anyone else thinks of my father? The dead feel nothing. David is living, and so am I."

Burdette looked at her face curiously before replying.

"Have you ever known what it is to be thirsty, Miss Cutts?"

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"Because I don't believe you have. Go without a drink for two or three weeks and find out. Then you will understand why David thinks hell is too good for your father. It is best to put this thing plainly. Cutts turned Quayle off his yacht to die of thirst."

"I don't believe it!"

"No? Then let me convince you if I can, so that you may see exactly what stands between you and David. I dragged it from your father's own lips the first night I came to your house," and with cold precision he went on, detailing to her the confession which he had sweated from the banker.

"Now," he went on, "if you have anything better in your veins than your father's blood, you will devote your whole life and all of your fortune to undoing the wreck which your father's insane cruelty made of Quayle's life and character. Your one excuse for living is to bring him back to a sane belief in his fellowship with his fellow man. You have inherited your father's debt. Cure David, no matter what it costs you!"

Burdette lapsed abruptly into his cold, professional manner.

"I have told you the facts, Miss Cutts, as you requested. Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Will you help me with David, and David against Barton?"

For a minute or two he sat silent, his chin in his hand, looking intently at her. Then suddenly, he agreed. "Yes, if I can. Take me to him!" and in half an hour they were on their way to San Francisco to join Quayle.

While Sheila was conferring with Burdette, Quayle spent the day in San Francisco tramping the ocean beach beyond the Cliff House. After seeing Sheila off on the train, he took a car to Golden Gate Park, walked through it, and out to the ocean. An irresistible impulse to hear once more the thunder of the surf on mile after mile of clean, firm sand drew him to the sea.

Just as he was about to start across the boulevard to the beach, a headline on a fresh newspaper arrested him like a shot. Displayed along with sensational murder, suicide and divorce bait to catch the passing eye, this six inch caption outbid all the rest,

DUMÈS LAUDS CUTTS

Flinging down a dollar, Quayle snatched a paper. Without waiting for his change he hurried to the beach. Seating himself at the edge of the spindrift

he calmly unfolded the paper. Dumès, he dimly recalled, was the name of the French banker—one of them—whom Cutts had mentioned casually in the course of a conversation before the fateful trip to Westralia.

As his eye seized the "story" his blood stopped in his veins. Cutts was dead. This fulsome eulogy by the florid French banker was the *discours* pronounced less than twenty-four hours previously at the commemorative services in honor of the great American financier whose genius and generosity had "saved France." Turning the page, Quayle devoured at a glance the manner and the method of France's salvation. The name "Barton" leapt out simultaneously from twenty places.

It appeared that Joseph Barton, technical expert and legal controller of the All American Chemical Products Corporation, and Cutts' right hand man had, with honesty unusual, faithfully carried out his late employer's noble intention, although Cutts had left no scrap of writing in the form of a will to fix and legalize that intention. Barton, the honest young American that he was, had put into effect the full splendor of Cutts' generous purpose although he was bound by nothing more tangible than a verbal promise to the dead man. This had all happened some five weeks before; M. Dumès, however, deemed it not inappropriate to rehearse the glorious story, now treasured by all historians of the world as their priceless heritage, at the solemn feast of sadness in commemoration of the lamented Cutts. A whole nation,

M. Dumès declared, now rendered loving homage to its saviour. Until this moment grief at their benefactor's decease had so overmastered their emotions that they had felt incapable of any expression save that of sorrow. Now, however, they lifted up their hearts in praise and thankfulness.

It was a noble oration. Quayle spat on it.

" 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' " he quoted under his breath with a savage sneer.

He leapt to his feet and ground the lying screed into the sand with his heel.

"Cutts is dead. As there is no damnation nowadays for the pious or the enlightened, he will never know what it feels like to be thirsty. He's dead. He's escaped!"

Blind with bitter hate he tramped like a machine down the beach, his head bowed and his back bent, as if he were carrying a cruel load. Mile after mile he trudged along the wet, firm sands at the edge of the wash, hypnotized by the ceaseless boom and thunder of the breakers.

Until now he had not realized how fiercely he had longed for revenge, for the opportunity to humiliate his dead enemy and bring his pride to the dust. But Death, the impartial jester, had robbed him of his bitter laugh. What did life now offer that was worth the taking? He trudged on like a dead machine, the invisible burden on his back doubling with each step of his waking nightmare. Time stood still an instant, then slipped swiftly back to the past.

The sun had set when Quayle stopped suddenly in

his tracks and stared at the white war of the waves. For the past twelve hours he had been walking through a dream. What had he been thinking of? With a shock he realized that for several hours his mind had been a complete blank. He had dropped back in time to Westralia and the last hours of his endless march up the dry river bed. For a moment he failed to reconcile the proximity of the sea and the vermilion bluffs which slowly faded from the retina of his memory. The waves contradicted the bluffs, the river bed made the ocean impossible. Gradually the reality steadied, and the false image dissolved into the past.

"This won't do," he muttered. "I must get back where there are human faces. Sheila——"

As he turned to make his way up to a highroad he paused for a moment to stare at the tumultuous white and purple billows racing like serried legions of impatient horses to the beach, only to be annihilated and vanish into the everlasting nothing, while the infinite armies behind them charged on to destruction with numbers undiminished.

" 'The sea is His, and He made it.' I shall unmake it," he muttered like a man talking in his sleep.

"Cutts wins," Quayle scoffed, as he turned his back on the waves. "I'm a fool, and he has proved it. I quit."

Speeding back to the hotel in a taxi which had just set down a pair of lovers at a roadhouse, he began to work over in his mind the probable significance of Dumès' oration. What was Barton up to? Was

he throwing up a smoke screen between himself and the rest of the world, France in particular, in order to pirate the invention in peace and privacy?

"I've got it!" he shouted, startling the driver just as they drew up to the hotel.

Dismissing the man with a handsome tip he darted for the entrance. Sheila, pale-faced and anxious, was waiting for him in the lobby.

"Pack up at once," he ordered. "We're going to New York on the midnight train."

"David," she faltered, "Dr. Burdette is here. I know now what my father did to you. Can you ever forgive me?"

"For what?"

"What he did."

"Oh, what does that matter! I've got Barton to think about. Please stop everlastingly harping on it. Why can't you look at the future instead of always harking back to what's dead and done with?"

"David!"

"Well, use your common sense. Unless you want to help, instead of going about with a face as long as an undertaker's, you can stay here till I get through with Barton. The business is urgent. If we don't stop that thief right away he will stop us. Well, why don't you run off and start packing?"

She gazed at him speechless with joy.

"You are better!"

"Of what?"

"I don't know, but you are better. This is the first time you have been yourself since we left Melbourne."

She hesitated. "You have heard that my father is dead?"

"Hours ago. We had better not talk of it. Sheila," he added tenderly, "I would offer you the conventional words of comfort if I thought you did not see how merciful an ending your father's life has had. But you do. Let us never speak of this again. Promise!"

"I promise. It is over. Well, I shall be ready in ten minutes. That is Dr. Burdette over there by the desk. Talk to him till I join you here. He will come with us."

"Is he safe?"

"Absolutely. And he knows something that will help us to get the better of Barton. That is why he is coming with us."

She hurried over to Burdette.

"You were right," she whispered. "David has learned of my father's death—how I don't know, and I don't care. He is cured. I'll introduce you. Tell him what you know of Barton. We are taking the midnight train to New York."

CHAPTER XXII

SMOKE SCREEN

BARTON was indeed lucky. The banker's death "coincided" to a day with two other events of the greatest importance to Barton. First, Cutts happened to die the very morning of Sheila's cablegram announcing that Quayle had left Sydney and was "probably" on his way to New York. There is of course no demonstrable connection between Sheila's hint to her father to stop exploiting the stolen invention and Cutts' death the same day. It may not have been a chain of cause and effect, but it looked like it. Second, the day that Cutts died, the "aquarium" was practically completed. On that day Barton saw himself within striking distance of his goal. Cutts, his generous collaborator, henceforth would only be a dangerous encumbrance, likely to reveal all he knew at the most inopportune moment in one of his womanish tantrums. So again there were ample reasons why the banker's health should suddenly fail as a consequence of Sheila's alarming cablegram.

On the other hand, Barton had been unfortunate in his estimate of M. Poyère's intelligence. It never occurred to him that the Frenchman would almost see through the elaborate smoke screen of the All Amer-

ican Chemical Products Corporation to the coy "aquarium" concealed behind it.

When it was too late, namely a week or so before the arrival of Sheila's second cablegram, Barton knew that he had erred. As he told Cutts on the morning of the episode in the shark tank, the spies—without a doubt Poyère's—had been hot on his trail for days. No longer could the chemist go quietly and safely about his business of decorating the "aquarium." Every workman must be watched like a dangerous snake; and every move must be shrouded up in the most mystifying secrecy, or the murder would be out. Worse, Barton soon learned that he must carry the incriminating blueprints and all details of the calculations on his person. Twice he found his own apartment turned inside out, and once Babe, his mistress of the moment, had enjoyed the same exasperating experience. Carrying the precious plans about with him day and night, Barton soon developed acute sensitiveness in the lumbar region, especially at night. He had no morbid repugnance to being shot through the brain, but the idea of accepting a long, foreign knife in the back sent a current of ice down his spine whenever he thought of it.

In addition to these not unreasonable physical fears, Barton began to experience the meaning of mental anguish. While M. Poyère was on the high seas, ably directing the naval forces of civilization, Barton enjoyed more than one feverish, wary session with the suave secret agents of the land forces. He found himself the target for innumerable interviews on this,

that and the other, but all more or less closely connected with the present and future policies of the huge "All American." He parried these as best he could, and always sat with his back close against the wall while being interviewed.

In spite of all these distractions, the chemist succeeded in completing the last detail of the supposed aquarium. Two weeks after the cremation of Cutts the plant was fully equipped and ready to operate.

Barton decided that the time was now ripe for playing his trumps. Before unloosing his grand assault upon civilization by beginning to operate the invention in secret, Barton thought it expedient to carry out the dearest wish of his late employer and save France.

From the beginning of his association with the banker, Barton had intended taking just this step the moment the aquarium was in working order, and now the time had come. Incidentally this flamboyant gesture of generosity would inaugurate the greatest joke in the history of the world. As he thought of what wiser but sadder historians would say in the not too distant future concerning the "salvation of France," the chemist burst into a roar of laughter, for somewhere in his cynical soul Barton concealed a Satanic sense of humor. He himself called in person on the French ambassador at the Capital to bear the glad tidings that the French people need no longer lie awake at nights in sweating terror that the Bolsheviks were about to climb in at the window and occupy their cosy beds. Holding the controlling interest in the huge All American as he did, Barton was in a position to do

with it what he liked, when he liked, and how he liked. He now did it, handsomely.

To the amazed but pleased ambassador he unfolded such a tale of far-seeing generosity and altruistic foresight as has but seldom brightened the dreary annals of high finance and international good-will. The late Mr. Cutts, hero of the Lucerne Gold Conference, he explained, had toiled like a Hercules at the gigantic Corporation—the world monopoly in chemicals—merely in order to save France and thereby redeem his pledge given at the Conference.

"You say Mr. Cutts carried on the Corporation merely to help France?" the Ambassador queried doubtfully. "But why?"

"Because he promised at the Lucerne Gold Conference to save France from Bolshevism by restoring the franc to its full pre-war standing."

The Ambassador knew little enough of finance. His feeling for human nature however was firm and true. This energetic young man before him, he saw at a glance, was no saint. In fact the chemist's face bore unmistakably the hall mark of the higher dissipation.

"I fear I do not understand," he confessed simply, to draw out his informant.

"If you had known Mr. Cutts as well as I got to know him," Barton replied, keeping a straight, solemn face, "you would see that he could have done nothing else but this if he had lived."

"Why?" the wary Ambassador persisted. Something at the back of his brain tried to warn him that

he was accepting a goldbrick for the salvation and the glory of his country.

"Because then," Barton explained, "you would have known his broad love for humanity as I have learned to know it."

The chemist spoke with a certain dignified shyness. There is a hushed delicacy about the speech of a loose man when he alludes to lofty emotions or noble actions. Barton simulated this shamefaced reserve to perfection.

"You may not know," he went on, "that practically all his life Cutts planned to banish forever the fear of anarchy from the world. He cared nothing for money on his own account. His one aim in organizing the All American was to recover his B. F. T. losses so that he could keep his pledge to the bankers of your country. What did he do? The annihilation of the B. F. T. removed all competition and gave him his chance. I know nothing about such things," Barton confessed, "but I honestly believe with Cutts that the disaster in Central Europe was a warning and an opportunity sent by Heaven. Those traitors at the B. F. T. were manufacturing high explosives when their whole vast plant blew up. Why?"

"We know!" the Ambassador agreed excitedly. "They were planning to attack France. We have it on unimpeachable authority."

"Precisely," Barton confirmed, "but what did Cutts do," he continued, "when the B. F. T. disaster put the chemical monopoly of the world in his hands? What did he do? In six months the All American

had cornered the world market in artificial fertilizers and had driven the natural stuff out of the field. With no European competition to fight the thing was a cinch.

"In an incredibly short time we had wiped out the B. F. T. losses. Then, he and I together, he as financial expert, I as technician, began to look around like Alexander the Great for more worlds to conquer. Today there is not a competitor in the world who can stop us. We have the hold on every commercial enterprise that uses chemical products in any shape whatever, from motion pictures to war. We could close every movie palace in the world tomorrow if we wished, and we could instantly stop any war that was started."

Having duly convinced the Ambassador that the All American was the financial colossus of all time, Barton then explained in detail the alleged plan of its deceased founder for "saving civilization from anarchy." First, and most obviously, the French franc must be restored to its feet. All of the thousands of millions of profits pouring annually into the treasury of the All American were to be placed at the disposal of the French government, or rather of its efficient bankers. Barton confessed that he himself now held the controlling interest in the Corporation. The gushing stream of golden profits thus diverted to the salvation of humanity was to be a gracious loan to the French government in the form of one per cent long-time bonds. The interest of one per cent was charged, Barton explained, not from the promptings of greed

on the part of the late Mr. Cutts, but solely in order that the French people should not feel humiliated by American "charity," and that the Corporation might make its running expenses in the cause of humanity. For his part, Barton announced, he would give his services gratis, to see that his late master's dearest wish did not miscarry.

When finally the Ambassador grasped what this actual, legal owner of the richest, most ruthless Corporation in the world was doing, he thrilled. This was indeed a noble gesture on the part of the young chemist, this renunciation of all personal gain, and it was not unworthy of a Frenchman. In fact, the Ambassador mused, it was almost Gallic in its delicate balance between sublimity and plain foolishness.

"You have French blood?" he breathed softly.

Barton sadly admitted that he was merely a one hundred per cent American.

"But no," the Ambassador politely contradicted. "Your soul at least is of our people. And what else matters? Our government will not be ungrateful. The Legion of Honor——" he began, and with true French delicacy hesitated.

"I don't care much for decorations," Barton replied slowly. "But there is one thing you might do for me that I should like."

"Name it, and it is yours."

"Well, it's rather hard to put plainly without giving offense, but here goes. Ever since the B. F. T. blew up, your bankers and secret service men have been lurking around the All American to see whether we

were planning to cheat France out of that gold Cutts promised at Lucerne. Don't you think it is about time to set us free from this espionage now that you know the truth?"

The Ambassador assured Barton that he must be mistaken. France, he swore on his honor as a diplomat, had always trusted Cutts implicitly. Nevertheless there might have been some slip, he admitted, on the part of one or other of the two great French banking concerns. He would make it his special care to have the oversight righted at once.

He did his best, poor man, but the one man who could authoritatively call off the French spies and apaches making Barton's life one continued round of excitement could not be reached. The land forces of Poyère's continued to press their offensive with undiminished vigor, and Barton cursed long and lustily. His elaborate smoke screen was after all only half a success.

A week after his call on the Ambassador, Barton could not pick up a newspaper without seeing his own name spotted all over it like black smallpox. The columnists, the special-article writers and the editorial writers of two continents seized upon "Barton's sacrifice" as a text from which they preached resounding sermons to the effect that the spirit of chivalry was not dead in business but merely sleeping.

With the law all on his side, and with not a scrap of evidence extant concerning his late employer's sacred intention, Barton had deliberately sacrificed this huge fortune in order that others might be led

toward the sane light of reason, and that freedom should not perish from the earth. The things they said about him could have made a hardened politician blush; they merely caused Barton to smile, in spite of the French spies. Even if the spies succeeded in knifing him before he really "lived," he should have the last laugh. If his perfect jest had exploded as he intended, it would have made fools not only of a handful of statesmen whom he knew at best by reputation and whom he humorously despised, but of several hundred millions of harmless, respectable citizens who had never heard of him.

Between the world and the cruelest jest ever imagined by a twisted mind, stood one man, Quayle. It is not the fault of Barton that the jest failed. When Quayle read Dumès' speech on the sands by the Cliff House in San Francisco, Barton acquired a foe more relentless than all of the prying spies and apaches of the government his jest would betray.

Cost what it might, Quayle was determined to crush Barton like a venomous snake. With the help of Burdette whom he had trusted almost from their first half-hour together, he saw no reason why Barton should not be defeated in a single encounter. But should the fight be long drawn out, Quayle was prepared to use the last resources of the law in order to win.

The morning the trio arrived in New York they went straight to work.

Barton found himself trapped. But he fought.

CHAPTER XXIII

BARTON AT BAY

By calling up the head office of the All American, Burdette learned that Barton was living in the Long Island house, superintending the construction of the Cutts Memorial Aquarium.

"Now," Burdette announced, "I shall go over at once. Quayle had better stay at my hotel—and keep out of sight. Miss Cutts, you must take a lodging in some part of the city where you are not known and where you know nobody. Never mind how dirty it is—we shall be here only a day and a half. Telephone the location of your room to me at the hotel, but don't give your name. Leave a message if I am not back when you telephone. Then tomorrow we can get you two legally tied and see about converting Mrs. Quayle's stocks, bonds and the rest into perfectly decent, anonymous United States gold certificates. I expect to see you off on your honeymoon within thirty-six hours. Now for Barton."

"I'll come with you as far as the ferry," Quayle volunteered. "The less Sheila and I are seen together the safer."

"Very well," Burdette agreed. "Keep out of sight, Miss Cutts, till you hear from us this afternoon."

They found a seat to themselves in the subway, so that they could talk freely.

"I am going to convince Barton that I know he murdered Cutts," explained the doctor. "Of course I know nothing of the kind. Still if ever there was a logical case of murder, this is it. Barton poked Cutts off that girder, or I know nothing of the criminal mind. He is guilty. My job is to make him believe that I can prove his guilt to a jury. The prospect of the electric chair will take all the joy out of his life. Never again will he dare to get thoroughly and gloriously drunk. Barton may be a fool, but he knows better than to drown himself in a gallon of whiskey. All this may be blackmail of a virtuous sort. Well, what of it? Like you I make no excuses, because I believe in humanity—and so do you. We have hulled off the theories and are down to the hard facts. I personally do not wish to see civilization smashed. So I descend to the tactics of the enemy."

"Blame your downfall on my invention," Quayle suggested with a wry smile.

"No," Burdette replied good humoredly. "You can't hurt my feelings. I am too good a man of science to blame my peccadilloes on the devil. Well, I must run."

Quayle left him at the ferry and took a taxi back to the hotel to await his return. If Burdette failed —and Quayle, knowing Barton better than the doctor did, was not over optimistic concerning the outcome of Burdette's attack—he himself must take up the fight and win. His reserves, he justifiably felt, were

invincible. Their use, however, would involve the danger of a personal encounter, and it seemed best to try Burdette's plan first for what it might be worth.

Burdette's surprise attack opened auspiciously.

For a handsome bribe the Japanese boy at the Cutts Long Island home reconsidered his first statement that his master was out. Barton in fact had just finished a late breakfast, and was about to set out for the aquarium. The boy's orders were to exclude all "visitors." Barton did not wish to receive the French spies while he was shaving, or making love, or while he was otherwise at an obvious disadvantage, and he knew that the house was watched every minute of the day and night.

Burdette walked into the hall with the assurance that he was an old friend, and, at a slight gesture from the faithful Japanese, marched on the breakfast room.

The enemy must have heard him coming. When the doctor entered the room only the ghost of a delicate perfume remained to betray its vanished mistress.

Barton was standing with his back to the fireplace and his right hand thrust loosely into his coat pocket.

A good twenty feet separated him from the doctor. Not unnaturally Barton suspected Burdette of being one of the French spies. Well, if this man carried a knife up his sleeve, he reflected as he critically scanned Burdette's face, he himself had an automatic in his coat pocket.

"Mr. ——?" Barton inquired, as if at a loss to place some acquaintance.

"Burdette. You doubtless heard your late employer speak of me?"

Barton of course knew that a Dr. Burdette of Pasadena had been Cutts' physician, for Cutts told him so the morning Sheila's first cablegram arrived. He could see no good reason however for telling all he knew. He slowly shook his head, and the doctor continued.

"Well, it is immaterial whether you have or not. Here is my card."

Burdette laid his professional card on the table, and Barton cautiously picked it up with his left hand, never withdrawing the right from its pocket.

"The fact is," Burdette continued, "Cutts was my patient. The valet and the confidential clerk, both of whom you got to know well, for they told me so, were appointed by me and paid by Cutts. They regularly reported the patient's progress to me by telegraph. They also reported the numerous quarrels between you and your employer."

Burdette could read nothing in the impassive eyes fixed steadily on his own. Barton, he noted, had not invited him to sit down. Evidently the supposed murderer of Cutts was sure of himself.

"Excuse me, doctor," he said bluntly, "but what has all this got to do with me?"

"Is your lady friend within hearing? For reasons of my own I don't wish to be forced to extremities. For one thing, you don't deserve the limit of the law

—at least according to my ethical standards you do not."

Barton boldly sidestepped the trap.

"Are you listening at the keyhole, Babe?" he called. "Come out and get a good earful. Dr. Burdette thinks he has some news for us."

The door on the other side of the cosy little room opened, and a well developed young blonde with innocent violet eyes and a sweetly pretty face, joined the two men. Burdette accepted the situation at its obvious value.

"Barton," the doctor said gravely, "I shall give you a fighting chance. You had better send this girl away."

"Spill it," Babe giggled. "Is his white-haired mother dead, or has the merry widow had twins? This is just like a movie."

With a glance of compassion at the dissolute young chemist, Burdette took the girl's advice.

"You are cohabiting with a murderer," he said, purposely adding insult to information.

The shot went clear over Babe's head. Although she was an artist in her profession she did not know its polite name. When she was what is dubbed by the French an honest girl, she had sweated like a slave for her honesty ironing sheets in a third rate laundry on the East Side. Without education, without money, without refinement, without brains, Babe yet possessed attractions which discounted the lack of them, for she was liberally endowed with beauty and charm of a sort, and with a fierce kind of faithfulness to her master.

At Burdette's incomprehensible assertion of fact her innocent violet eyes rounded, not with shame or wonder, but with plain stupidity.

Barton meanwhile had walked across the room to the door. As he stood with his hand on the knob, Burdette watched him closely. The right hand in the coat pocket did not escape his expert attention.

"It's not much use, if you are thinking of trying to escape," he suggested.

"Not just yet," Barton retorted significantly. "I have some telephoning to do first. Come out in the hall and hear it, if you like."

Burdette followed him to the telephone.

"Emergency Hospital?" Barton inquired when he got his number. "This is Mr. Barton speaking from the Cutts place. Send an ambulance at once to fetch a doctor who has gone insane."

He hung up and faced Burdette.

"Will you wait for the ambulance," he asked coolly, "or are you well enough to walk to the hospital? It is just half a mile away in the village, right next to the police station."

"Walk down to the gate with me, and I'll tell you there how I feel."

With a curt nod to the beautiful Babe, whose curiosity had drawn her into the hall, he accompanied Barton to the front door.

"Look here, Barton," he said quietly, when once they were out of hearing of the house, "you killed Cutts. One of those nurses saw you do it. He was paid to keep constant watch over your employer."

Barton did not move a muscle as Burdette proceeded to administer his carefully prepared third degree. Halting abruptly in his walk he faced his inquisitor and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"On my orders," the doctor continued, "the nurses gave Cutts more liberty while you and he were working on the aquarium. Still, one of them was always watching every movement Cutts made. The morning Cutts broke his neck the nurse was watching through the crack of the aquarium door on the upper landing. He followed you and Cutts from the house."

Burdette's fabrication failed. Innocent or guilty Barton was not easily bluffed.

"The ambulance should roll up the road any minute now," he remarked. "There's the gate. Will you walk to the hospital or would you prefer a ride?"

"Never mind the hospital," Burdette retorted. "That ambulance will be a good many years on the way. You held the hook down while you were telephoning. I saw you. I brought you out here to talk because I don't want your woman complicating matters. Now then, that nurse saw Cutts fall."

"He must have good eyes," Barton replied nonchalantly. "We locked the aquarium door behind us that morning."

Burdette seized his opportunity.

"Who had the key?" he snapped.

"Cutts had one, and I had the other."

"So you walked back over the girder you were on, unlocked the door, and walked out on the girder again before you shouted for help?"

"Before I shouted the third time, certainly. That nurse of yours was loafing on his job that morning."

"How would you like to explain all that to a jury?"

"I don't intend explaining it to anyone."

"Then you will commit suicide?"

"Not so long as I can commit you to a lunatic asylum."

"That won't go, Barton, and you know it. I am too well established as an alienist and a criminologist. What I say in a court of law goes."

"I am fairly well known myself as a chemist. And if I do have to give evidence against you it won't be the first time I have done my stunts before twelve boobs and a thirteenth on the bench. The judges know me pretty well as a high-class witness in chemical patent suits and such stuff."

"Still, murder is an ugly charge, even if you are acquitted. I will keep your case away from the police on one condition. You are never, under any circumstances, to use Quayle's invention."

"Quayle's invention? What do I know about it?"

"A great deal too much. More than enough to make you dangerous when you're drunk. Some day you will confide in one of your harem, and then we shall all suffer. This absurd gift of yours in the name of Cutts to the French Republic gives your whole game away to anyone who knows a fact or two on the inside. Don't think for a moment that your foolhardy chivalry, or generosity, or whatever the papers call it, is going to keep you out of the electric chair. It may be a good enough blind to prevent the public from

suspecting what you are really doing, but it isn't quite good enough for me. Cutts told me a number of interesting things. On the whole I should say I know as much of the essentials as you do."

"Probably more," Barton scoffed. "You know a lot that isn't so."

"That may be. Here are my terms. Operate the invention and you stand trial for the murder of Cutts. And further I shall give you just six weeks to scrap what you have been doing in this pretended aquarium of yours. Unless you throw the place open to the public—fish or no fish—six weeks from today, I shall set the district attorney onto you. He's a good man. Not a single murderer that his office has prosecuted so far has escaped the chair. So start at once scrapping your machinery, or whatever it is that you need to operate Quayle's invention. And if you think you can camouflage your robbery by quitting operations here and starting up again in South America or some other quiet spot, you're wrong. I am authorized—never mind by whom—to spend money in tracking you no matter where you go. Remember, I give you six weeks to clean up. The moment you use Quayle's invention I go to the police. After that it will only be a matter of weeks. You get the point, don't you?"

"Sure. Who wouldn't? I'm not as dumb as Babe. But on my honor, doctor, you're utterly mistaken. I know no more about Quayle's invention than Babe does."

"Then it will be easy for you to live within my terms. Personally, as I have tried to make plain, I

have no desire to see you electrocuted. You are guilty, but there are extenuating circumstances. Think it over."

"I wish I had your imagination, doctor," Barton remarked, shaking hands with him. "You live out there close to Hollywood," he continued, glancing at Burdette's card. "Why don't you write for the movies? They say there's a lot of money in that game."

Burdette made no answer, and the iron gate clanged behind him.

Barton watched him down the road. He saw a stocky lounger stop Burdette at the corner and ask him for a light.

"One of those damned French spies," Barton muttered as he turned moodily away and took the path through the trees to the aquarium.

The spy got nothing out of Burdette beyond a light for his pipe. In answer to his affable, apparently half-tipsy attempt to strike up an acquaintance, Burdette cut the man off with a short admonition to mind his own business.

"I guess who you are," he informed the astonished man as he moved away. "Who are your employers? And how long have you lived in the United States?"

"Who the hell are you?" the apache demanded with a vicious snarl.

"Keep your hands in front of you!" Burdette ordered sharply. "See that traffic cop with his motor cycle over there?"

The spy glanced at the officer, then at Burdette with

a calculating, murderous look. Deciding that the risk was too great, he resisted his impulse to stick the doctor as soon as his back was turned.

"So they are after Barton, too," the doctor mused, as he hurried for the ferry. "I wonder how that happened? Barton must be a greater fool than I thought."

Barton was shaken but not routed.

"Hell," he said with a short laugh as he slapped one of the six huge concrete salt water intakes of the aquarium, "if I can't settle that damned meddler in six weeks I'm a bigger fool than he is." He burst into a shout of laughter as an idea struck him. "I'll invite him over next week to see that the tanks are fish tanks and nothing more."

Passing into the concrete and steel basement of the aquarium, he carefully locked the door behind him, switched on the electric lights, and lovingly inspected the steel doors, each with its time lock, as invulnerable as the armor of a bank vault, and as superfluous in a genuine aquarium as dining tables would be in a morgue. Everything was of the finest materials and in perfect working order.

He stepped into the automatic elevator, closed the double gates, pressed the button, and ascended to the main floor. Here all was open and aboveboard, a vast gallery of fish tanks and nothing more. By a wise innovation the fresh sea water was continually supplied from the perforated floor, screened over with a fine wire mesh to prevent the escape of the adventurous fish. The fish however had not yet arrived. The tanks had yet to be stocked. Casual visitors

would hardly suspect that under each tank another, deeper tank, also full of salt water, snuggled coyly and unseen in the bosom of the silent earth. The sub-tanks were for Barton's private purposes, the upper for the delectation of the fish-loving public—whenever Barton should see fit to declare the aquarium finished and open to the fish enthusiasts from all lands.

Having looked upon the work of his hands and brain and found it good, Barton proceeded down the main gallery to his private office. This spacious room was guarded by what, to even a close inspection, looked like a solid oak door. The handle in itself was a rare work of mechanical ingenuity, for it was nothing less than a time lock concealed beneath an elaborate design of dolphins. Taking a key from his pocket, Barton inserted it in the mouth of one of the dolphins. The carving opened, disclosing the elaborate mechanism, as delicate as a chronometer. The lock was not yet running, as Barton as yet had nothing in particular to conceal with absolute secrecy. A control lock, which might be opened by an ordinary key, served well enough his present purposes. This lock also was concealed behind the dolphin mask, and it released the elaborate mechanism of steel bolts operated by the time lock when the latter was set. To break into Barton's private office in his absence would be a stiff job for an expert mechanic, provided with all the necessary tools, and utterly beyond the resources of any prowling apache.

Barton entered the room, as black as the interior of a mausoleum. Not a single window or skylight

offered prying eyes an invitation to see what the occupant of the office was doing. With a smile Barton turned on the electric lights and glanced about him. Espying the small wall safe to his left, he walked over, opened it, and extracted one of his treasures—a full quart of Jamaica rum, seventy-five years old. Pouring himself a liberal drink he slowly savored the exquisite fire with the lingering relish of the connoisseur. As if it were the most precious elixir in the universe, he restored the spirit to its safe, locked the door, and looked about him.

Four easy chairs, a long, carved table of rosewood, and a few oriental rugs completed the furnishings of the office.

"Safety first," he chuckled, sliding one of the corner rugs off the neat metal trapdoor which it concealed. Unlocking the door he raised it to see if all was in working order underneath. The copper switches and the delicate brass and crystal mechanism of the time controls were just as he had left them the previous day. Nothing was amiss, for the excellent reason that only he or some enterprising secret agent with a modern blasting equipment could hope to enter that room.

That neat metal box of electric switches and highly scientific clockwork was Barton's last line of defense. Should the unforeseen happen, and he be forced fighting into the last ditch, he could at least rob his enemies of their triumph by tampering with the switches and the dials in that small sunken metal box. Not being yet in the last desperate fix, he lowered the steel

trapdoor, locked it, slid the rich rug over the telltale metal, and then proceeded to treat himself to another drink.

"Burdette—bah!" he remarked contemptuously, and locking up, he left the aquarium to see what Babe had ordered for lunch.

Late that afternoon Quayle and Burdette met at the hotel. Quayle received the doctor's report in silence.

"Barton is a refreshing sort of scoundrel," Burdette concluded. "After Cutts he is like a breath of clean air. I do hope he has sense enough to let your invention alone."

"Fear won't stop him," Quayle replied. "Barton is afraid of nothing. He always was that way. You see," he continued, "Barton has more brains than a hundred good honest lawyers, doctors, judges, chemists and the like rolled into one. He knows he is strong in the head. So why should he hold back when he realizes his superiority? In my opinion, Doctor, your attack has been completely repulsed. Six weeks from today Barton will have disguised his aquarium so that not even I could see what it really is, or else he will have served you as you say he served Cutts. Now I'm going to spring my own offensive on him. Come with me to a place where we can telephone in private. He must not get our number from the operator."

They passed out of the hotel in search of a public telephone station. Finding what they wanted, both

Burdette and Quayle entered one of the booths, and the doctor asked for Barton's Long Island number.

Presently a thick voice asked who in the hell was talking. Barton had been lavishly celebrating his easy victory over Burdette.

"Do you recognize my voice?"

There was a long pause at Barton's end.

"Can't say I do," the voice replied, a trifle more steadily.

"I have just had Dr. Burdette's report," Quayle continued. "Do you know now who I am?"

"Oh, it's you, is it, Doctor?" Barton laughed. "What's the joke, anyway?"

"How could Burdette report to himself?" Quayle demanded. "By the way, how drunk are you?"

"So-so. What's on your mind, whoever you are?"

"Just this. You recognize my voice. Pull yourself together and get this straight. If you pirate my invention——"

"What invention?"

The voice at the other end of the wire had become hard and clear, although the man holding the receiver tottered like a drunkard about to collapse. So that fool Poyère had blundered just as Cutts had, after all! What next?

"My invention," Quayle rapped. "Electro-colloids, you know. Sea-water. Does that make it plain?"

"Who is this talking?" Barton demanded in a level voice. He was now as sober as a corpse and in complete possession once more of his iron nerve.

"Quayle."

"Quayle?" a delighted cry echoed. "Why, old man, I'm awfully glad you're back. Why didn't you say who you were in the first place instead of trying to break the news by pulling a bum practical joke? How is the old preacher, anyway? Mr. Cutts told me shortly before he died that Sheila had found you playing possum out somewhere in Australia. What was the big idea, anyway, all this dying and coming to life like a movie? Was there a woman in the case?"

"Not that I know of," Quayle replied grimly. "Now, get this straight. If you——"

"Not so fast," Barton laughed. "I'm dizzy. Where are you staying?"

"You must excuse me for not telling you where I am staying. Did you hear of the disaster to that French cruiser at Samoa? Well, I guess you were at the bottom of that, although just how you did it I haven't had time to figure out. Do you think I'm still as innocent as I was, after the education you and Cutts have given me? Hardly! I want to enjoy a quiet rest tonight, so don't imagine I'll give you the chance of setting the French onto me again."

"Ha, ha!" Barton laughed. "The sober old preacher is as drunk as a lord at last. Come over here and I'll show you a real time. I've got everything, from 1776 to date—Champagne, pre-war Scotch, wine, liqueurs—the Lord only knows what."

"I'm coming," Quayle retorted with deadly calm, "and if you pirate my invention, I shall do two things."

"What's the first?" Barton asked, choking with

laughter. "This is as rich as a play. Won't you have a head tomorrow morning?"

"The first," Quayle continued, "is simply this. I shall do to you what you did to me, only mine will have more unpleasant consequences than yours. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Can't say I do, preacher."

"Then you are less keen than you used to be. But you see clearly enough what I mean. If I choose I can ruin you tomorrow by telling the French Ambassador the truth about you and your aquarium."

Barton laughed sarcastically. "Well, what's the second act in your drunken dream?"

"Just this. The day you begin using my invention I shall publish the whole process broadcast in the leading chemical and popular journals of Europe and America. Then every mechanic with a grammar school education will be able to do what you and I can do now. So *now* do you understand?"

"Say, preacher, what is this invention you keep raving about?"

"It's no use trying to bluff now, Barton. You have listened too long to what I had to say."

"So you think I have something that belongs to you? Well, well! Honest, preacher, I don't know what you're driving at. But to satisfy yourself, why not run over and see me? I'll let you nose all through, over and under the place."

"All right, I'll be there by the first morning boat. Now I'll let my friend Dr. Burdette have the wire for a minute. He has heard everything so far."

"Hullo, Doctor," Barton hailed jovially. "You're part of the show too. What's worrying you?"

"Nothing, Barton. Listen for a moment, will you? When Quayle goes over to see you tomorrow morning I stay here, with a letter. That letter will be addressed to the French Ambassador. If Quayle is not back here by three o'clock in the afternoon the letter will be carried by a special messenger to the Ambassador in Washington, D. C. By the way, this is a public telephone office, so the girl can't give you Quayle's number when I ring off. Is that enough?"

"Plenty," Barton scoffed. "But get Quayle sober before you send him over here. I don't want him to shock Babe."

As Burdette and Quayle left the telephone office to return to their hotel and compose the letter to the French Ambassador, Barton hung up the receiver at his end and walked slowly into the living room.

"Babe," he said, "I'm feeling rather blue. Let's have a little celebration tonight, just you and I. Tell the chef to throw together a real feed. We'll spread, for once."

"Sure thing, kid," she cried happily. "Is my Barty blue? What is it, old kid? Tell your Babe, and it will all be roses."

"I'll tell you after dinner," he replied slowly, giving her a deep, searching look which made her blood run cold. "Run along now, like a good girl."

He walked over to the cellarette and poured himself out a stiff jolt of neat whiskey.

"Hell," he said, crashing the empty glass into the

grate, "I win. What's life, anyway? A short drunk and a long sobering up. I haven't quite done with Master David Quayle yet! Ha, ha," he laughed significantly. "I hope he'll enjoy what's coming to him!"

CHAPTER XXIV

QUITS

As Barton had intended, his little dinner was strictly *en famille*. Only the loving Babe shared his meat and drink. Although the chemist drank more than usual he did not get drunk. Neither did Babe, for she was a young woman of parts. She always knew by instinct when it was time to stop, and then she stopped. Her lord and master never pressed her to drink more than she could carry. He preferred her half-sober, and tonight he was inclined to be fastidious.

All through the meal Babe exerted herself to cheer her lover. He was blue indeed, for even she failed to rally him completely. Nevertheless she did make him smile, and she was happy, poor girl, for her living no less than her love, depended solely on her own honest efforts to please.

The sad little feast neared its conclusion. Barton rang for the Japanese boy and asked him to bring stamps, envelopes and writing paper. Excusing himself to Babe, he first wrote a letter to the French Ambassador in Washington, D. C.

"Your Excellency:

"My friend, Mr. David Quayle, some years ago, perfected the invention whose bare description is

given on the enclosed sheet. Kindly observe, if you will, that I am forced by lack of time to omit all hints as to how this tremendous invention can be made to work. You will note, I think, that I tell you precisely nothing except the nature of the invention. Your chemists, able as they are, will find this enclosed scrap of paper quite worthless.

"For your information, Excellency, I may state that Mr. Quayle is at present in New York. Should you have any difficulty in locating him, he may be easily traced through his friend, Dr. Burdette of Pasadena, now also in New York. This hint to a man of your understanding should prove sufficient. If not, you may communicate with your secret service in Paris, mentioning the name of M. Poyère. The hint, coupled with M. Poyère's name, will suffice your statesmen in what is the very necessary task of preventing Mr. Quayle from exploiting his invention and so bringing indescribable disaster upon your great country.

"Accept, sir, the assurance of my highest esteem.

"JOSEPH BARTON."

Having dashed off this effective epistle Barton proceeded to write out a short, clear statement of what Quayle's invention could accomplish. This he folded up with the letter, and sealed both in a long envelope which he stamped and addressed to the Ambassador.

He then rang for the Japanese boy and told him to go to the village the following day.

"Take the afternoon off," Barton ordered, "and mail this letter while you are in the village. Register it and get a return receipt. I'll put it up here by the

clock so you won't forget it. Here's five dollars for you. Keep the change, and don't spend it all on one lady."

The boy grinned and went about his business.

Babe, neglected, had been growing peevish.

"What's the idea, kid?" she pouted. "I thought this was to be a party. You're as cheerful as an undertaker at a picnic."

"I'm making my will," he replied with grim humor. "What shall I leave you besides my love?"

Half frightened Babe began to whimper.

"You shouldn't joke about such things. It isn't nice."

Some all but forgotten remnant of the poor girl's early training floated mistily up from the forgotten past and made her sad. In her simple girlhood death was a sacred thing, and now, in her fuddled condition she was shocked at Barton's levity. Seeing her puritanical distress Barton was amused.

"Like to go to hell with me, Babe?" he asked with a tenderness which was only part in jest.

Terrified half out of her silly wits she stared wild-eyed at him and shook her curly head. She was like a frightened child about to be punished. Was this to be one of those horrible shooting rows she was always reading about in the Sunday supplements? What had she done?

"I swear to God," she stammered, "I've been straight."

Barton laughed.

"I didn't mean that. I know you haven't, Babe,"

he added tenderly. "You're a good girl in spite of me. So you don't want to come along?"

"Go to bed," she suggested, "and sleep it off. You're drunk."

Babe had a practical mind, such as it was.

"Not a bad idea," he laughed. "Let's have a night-cap."

He filled two liqueur glasses and offered her one. To humor him she accepted the glass, although she had had enough.

"Get me one of those sweet cakes off the sideboard, will you?"

She set down her glass and rose obediently. The moment her back was turned Barton extracted two small brown pellets from his vest pocket, dropped one into his own glass, and reached with the other toward Babe's. He was about to drop the pellet into her glass when she spoke.

"These cakes are pretty good," she remarked with the judicial air of a connoisseur. "I'll have some too."

"Poor kid," he muttered under his breath, and dropped the second pellet into his own glass.

She returned nibbling a small cake.

"These are the best," she said, offering him one.

"Thanks, Babe. By the way, I have a surprise for you. Excuse me a moment while I fetch it."

He left the room and went to his study. There he took from a drawer in the desk a thick sheaf of thousand-dollar bills which he always kept near him as "an emergency fund." These he carefully wrapped up into a packet, the ends of which he sealed. He

next scribbled on a scrap of paper, "Ask the bank manager to invest this in long time U. S. government bonds for you. Never sell a bond. Live on the interest. The bank will pay you what is coming to you every month. It will be plenty. Go straight, if you like; if not, think of me sometimes. J. B."

The money which the parcel contained was for the most part the remnant of the blackmail which Barton had extorted from Cutts. Thus ended the great banker's private fortune, pensioning his murderer's mistress.

Quickly placing the note in an envelope, which he tied to the parcel of notes, he rejoined Babe.

"Babe," he said, "how would you like to go back to the laundry?"

"I'd die first."

"That's how I always felt about chemistry—only I never had the nerve to die. It's just so much washing and ironing to me. Without money to fling at the birds, life isn't much, is it? I haven't a great amount left to fling. It might last a year or two, but then I should be back washing bottles."

He handed her the package.

"Don't open this till tomorrow morning when we're both sober. It's for you, in case I ever go broke. Just now I'm drunk and generous. You will never have to work again. Neither shall I."

"Have you made your pile?"

"I've *seen* it," he laughed.

"Then grab it while the grabbing's good."

"It is so big," he said slowly, "that any man who

had once seen it would die rather than pig along without it. Give us a kiss, Babe."

Suddenly, as her lips left his, he stiffened.

"What's up?" she whispered tensely.

"Did you hear it?" he asked in a low tone.

"What?"

"Someone is climbing up the ivy to the window. Don't scream. Wait; I'll fix him."

He tiptoed to the window, flung it suddenly open, and peered out. Flattened against the ivy about ten feet from the ground, a dark figure hugged the wall like a barnacle. Although the spy was at his mercy Barton did not shoot. Closing the window with a sardonic smile he rejoined Babe.

"I'm drunk, I guess," he remarked indifferently. "There's nothing there. Well, let's get to bed and sleep it off." He raised the liqueur glass with its fatal liquid to his lips. "Here's luck," he said. He was about to toss the contents of the glass down his throat when he paused, and held the glass thoughtfully in his hand.

That slight interruption had loosened the grip of death already eager to clutch him by the throat.

In a flash his whole intention changed. With a shout of laughter he hurled the glass into the grate. Babe stared at him white with terror.

"You're drunk," she moaned.

"Sure I'm drunk!" he laughed. "That's why I chucked the drink away. I've had enough. Here, give me back that."

He snatched the paper-covered parcel from her hand.

"I'm going out to take a walk in the moonlight and sober up," he announced. "Don't wait up for me. I'll be back in two hours."

Babe tried vainly to restrain him, but he roughly shoved her aside and strode into the hall. Not stopping to look for his hat, he flung open the front door, and set off at a rapid pace for the trail through the trees.

Reaching his office, Barton first attended to what he sardonically called his last line of defenses. Sliding aside the corner rug he unlocked the metal trapdoor, raised it, and adjusted the dials. He then, after a moment's deliberation, set the time controls. Then, lest he himself should falter at the last moment and turn back, he smashed the unlocking device which governed the intricate train of cogs and gears dominating the whole ingeniously planned system of defenses that made his fortress sheerly impregnable. It would be possible for an army to capture the subterranean works, but to hold their gains would be beyond the powers of the victors. Before they knew what threatened them, they and their prize would have taken the short, immortal road to glory. Nothing on earth could now alter the inevitable thinking of that remorseless brain of metal and crystal. Its unlocking device, its sane control, was damaged beyond human repair. The last line of Barton's defenses was already in operation. Within sixty hours his last enemy would taste the full bitterness of victory.

Having locked the steel trapdoor, Barton neatly covered it with the oriental rug.

"I've crossed my Rubicon," he remarked with a dry laugh.

Striding to the wall safe which contained his rarest treasures, he unlocked it and extracted two glasses, and an assortment of his choicest wines and spirits. These he arranged on the long table with hospitable care, and drew up two easy chairs, one on either side of the table, within easy reach of the drinks.

He next assured himself that his "life insurance" —as he grimly called his last weapon against the relentless processes of the law—was intact. From his vest pocket he fished out half a dozen brown pellets of the same kind as that which he had intended for himself and Babe as "sleeping potions." With meticulous care he selected one pellet which he restored to his vest pocket. The rest he flung casually into a corner of the room.

His preparations were now complete. He locked up and went back to the house.

Obedient to her master's order, Babe had retired. The Japanese boy, drowsy as an owl, alone waited to receive his employer.

"You remember what I told you to do about that letter in the dining room?" Barton inquired.

The boy repeated his instructions.

"That's O.K.," Barton remarked approvingly. "Don't mail it till five minutes to six tomorrow afternoon, and don't forget the registration whatever you do. Now, here's a small parcel I want you to register and mail at the same time."

He drew from his pocket the package of bills which

he intended for Babe, addressed it carefully, and handed it to the boy.

"It's a birthday surprise for the lady," he said with a smile, "and I don't want her to get it before the day after tomorrow. Now, tell me what you are to do with it."

On the boy's repeating faithfully his orders, Barton presented him with a twenty-dollar bill, bade him goodnight, and went up to bed.

His sleep was as deep and as dreamless as that of a condemned murderer who has been mercifully drugged for his last night on earth.

At six o'clock he rose, bathed, shaved, and dressed with his usual care, and sat down to an early breakfast. When Babe finally descended rather shakily to the breakfast room she found Barton gone.

At nine o'clock Quayle appeared at the Cutts residence alone and asked for Dr. Barton. Over Burdette's protest he had decided to fight it out single-handed with Barton, as he anticipated no difficulty in bringing his brother chemist to terms. Barton, he rightly judged, was not the kind of a fool who commits a crime for which he can be executed, and the covering letter to the French Ambassador which Quayle had left with Burdette seemed ample insurance against kidnapping. Against any ordinary criminal Quayle's campaign was ironclad and invincible. But it happened that Barton was no ordinary criminal and now was fighting his last fight in his last ditch.

The Japanese boy informed Quayle that his master

had left instructions for him to bring the visitor over to the aquarium. Dr. Barton, he said, had himself gone there early to attend to some work in connection with the tanks.

The boy led him directly to Barton's "office"—the vault-like room without window or skylight on the main floor of the aquarium—saying that his employer would probably be working there. The door was ajar.

Hearing footsteps in the corridor, Barton dashed out to welcome his old friend.

"Well, well, preacher," he exclaimed jovially, extending his hand—which Quayle affected not to see. "How's the big headache this morning?"

"My head is all right," Quayle retorted, "how's yours? This is strictly a business call. I want to see through the aquarium."

For a second Barton studied the face of his old friend.

"You've changed a lot," he remarked. "What happened?"

"Never mind that now. Show me what you have been doing here."

"Sure," Barton acquiesced readily. "Then we can have a long talk. Well, where shall we begin? This is the office," he said, indicating the steel door that looked like oak. "By the way," he called after the Japanese boy, "tell your mistress I may not be home for lunch. My friend and I have a lot to do. Shut the outer door after you."

Barton, as if in obedience to habit, then absently closed the door of his office. He and Quayle were

now alone in a vault stronger than a bank's, behind a shut door that might defy an army.

Barton wasted no words.

"Have a drink," he invited hospitably, "before we go through the tanks? No? Well, you won't mind if I do?"

"Go ahead," Quayle remarked indifferently.

Barton contrived to turn his back for an instant as he passed to the other side of the room so that the table now separated him from Quayle.

"Preacher," he said, pouring himself a pony glass of the priceless rum, "I am damned sorry for you. After all Cutts did to you I should think you would have learned a little about human nature. But you haven't. You are still as green as virgin grass. Now, I'm going to do the square thing by you. You will find all the documents and a letter in that drawer of the table just opposite you. Here's luck."

Raising the glass ironically as if to toast his friend, he quickly slipped in the brown pellet. Before Quayle could leap across the table to dash the glass from the steady hand which held it, Barton had raised it to his lips.

"Quits!" he cried, and with a quick jerk tossed the contents of the glass down his throat.

In thirty seconds he was dead.

CHAPTER XXV

RIGHTED

Four hours had passed since Quayle, having read Barton's cynical note informing him that the aquarium was heavily mined and that the time-ignition device had already been started working, first comprehended the full brutality of Barton's fiendish revenge. That any human being in his right senses should imagine such a devilish retribution for his own well-merited downfall as Barton inflicted on Quayle, passed the victim's comprehension. At first he had been tempted to seek a short release from the unendurable suspense; but self-respect stayed his hand, and he continued to live, momently dreading the agonizing concussion which should pulverize his every nerve and hurl him, fully conscious, into the stark, white terror of an expectant eternity.

In spite of all the consolations of religion, death is, and ever must remain, the terror of terrors to a sound, living body. The robust, healthy man who asserts that he does not fear death is already marked by the white hand of time, or he is a liar. Only the sick can read the writing on the wall and not blanch. The man who is virile and alive fears death. Quayle was by nature a skeptic; his dreary marches on the Westralian beaches had but confirmed his hard pessimism.

"I prayed for a drop of water," he muttered, pacing his steel prison, "and what was the answer? A cloud that lied, and two drops of rain. Now, if I call, who can hear me?"

He removed his shoes and hammered persistently on the steel door with the heels. The thin racket, wearying him at last, died.

"What is the use?" he muttered. "I was born a fool; a fool I shall die. To save civilization from ruin I came in here without a weapon in my hand, when common-sense might have given me the whole world to make of what I would. I deserve to die, but I hate to leave it all when it is beginning to mean something."

The corpse on the silken rug, face up and tranquil as an effigy, smiled the calm smile of eternal indifference.

Quayle thought of his invention.

What, precisely, was the fatal quality in his discovery that rotted the characters of men and degraded them to a status a little lower than that of swine? Cutts, not essentially bad, had degenerated under the sinister bale of the fatal invention. Barton, as whole a man as God ever made in spite of his indurated cynicism, had wilted like a diseased plant; at least two nations were ready to cut each other's throats to possess the foul abomination. Was not Cutts, in spite of all his cowardice, right? And what of Barton?

"'A scourge of God and a menace to humanity,'" Quayle quoted finally, with a glance at Barton's upturned face. "You were right, Cutts!"

Having exhausted the futile means at his command for summoning help, Quayle resigned himself to a vain attempt to sleep. He drank deep of the proffered liquors, but he could not get drunk. Through all his vigil he retained a ghastly, exact sobriety. The fiery liquids he swallowed merely intensified the crystal clarity of his insistent expectancy.

Barton had neglected no detail to make his last enemy's death watch unendurable. The blueprints in the drawer of the table were accompanied by minute and exact elaborations of all the deceased chemist's dealings with the governments of Euorpe.

Quayle had arrived at the aquarium a few minutes after nine in the morning. Barton's grand "transformation" was scheduled to come off at six o'clock that evening. Quayle therefore had well over eight hours in which to become familiar with death in its most hideous form. Fear is largely a matter of anticipation; Barton, with drunken foresight had provided exactly eight and a fraction hours of prevision for his victim.

About eleven o'clock Sheila cautiously called Burdette by telephone at his hotel. She had not seen Quayle since she parted from him on their arrival in New York, when Burdette and he left for the ferry and she set out to find obscure but safe lodging. In accordance with Burdette's plan she had informed him the previous afternoon of her address. She now called him to learn what Quayle was doing and what were their joint plans for the day.

On hearing that Quayle had gone over to Long Island, alone, to interview Barton, she almost dropped the receiver.

"You let him go *alone?*" she demanded.

Burdette, rather shaken in his easy confidence, assured her that there was no danger.

"After what Barton did to my father?" she asked in shocked amazement. "You can't understand Barton!"

In vain did Burdette hint as broadly as he dared over the telephone that the "hostage" of the letter to the French Ambassador was a sufficient guarantee against any murderous move on Barton's part. Sheila would have none of it. Without further reproaches she announced her intention of following Quayle at once.

"I shall take a police officer," she declared.

"For Heaven's sake, don't!" Burdette implored. "Have you forgotten Samoa? Whatever happens you and David must not come to life. You are officially dead. Don't you realize that death is your one shelter?"

"Then what am I to do?"

"Meet me at the ferry. I'll go with you, if you insist. But really, there is not the slightest danger. Barton would not dare do anything that might get him noticed by the police. Don't you see?"

"You don't know Barton, doctor. Meet me at the ferry."

The trip to Long Island was one long expostulation on Sheila's part, parried by a wavering defense on

Burdette's. When they arrived at the Cutts' summer home, Burdette was almost as panicky as Sheila. Too late he began to appreciate the fatal blunder which he and Quayle had committed in underestimating the strength of the enemy. Being himself in the full vigor of a healthy manhood, it had not occurred to Burdette that Barton should hold victory at a price above what he was willing to pay for life. Although the doctor regarded Barton as an interesting criminological case, he had not yet judged him insane, as he had Cutts. As only the mentally unbalanced take their own lives while in the full possession of their physical health, it had not occurred to Burdette that Barton, apparently the sanest criminal he had ever known, would choose the one road to triumph which yet remained unblocked.

The Japanese boy admitted them, grudgingly, to the hall.

"Is your master in?" Burdette demanded.

"No, sir."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You lie!"

The doctor suddenly seized the insolent boy by the throat and almost shook the breath out of his body.

"Where is Dr. Barton?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me or I will thrash you."

"I don't know," the faithful retainer reiterated sullenly.

"Then here goes."

Burdette, now thoroughly alarmed, began to beat the stolid Japanese with his cane. Sheila tried to interfere, but the doctor shoved her aside. The boy, true to his generous master, took his beating like a Spartan. Presently in the struggle he crashed into the mirror and brought it splintering to the tile floor in a shower of noisy fragments.

A door opened, and Babe emerged, white-faced and terror stricken.

"What is all this?" she demanded tremulously.

"Where is Barton?" Burdette shouted. "Tell us, at once!"

"I won't!" she flashed, scenting danger to her mate.

Burdette strode toward her and gripped her arm.

"Where is Barton? Tell me, or I shall have him arrested for murder."

Wrenching herself free she retreated into the room where she and Barton had shared their last meal. Burdette followed.

"Don't be a fool," he said. "Tell me where your man is if you don't want him sent to the chair."

Babe, shaken but still in possession of her caution, faced him like a lioness protecting her cub.

"I don't know," she repeated, embellishing the assertion with a wreath of expletives which made Sheila blanch.

"You don't know? Then your man sits in the chair."

Burdette faced about in search for the telephone. His eyes swept the mantlepiece, taking in the long envelope addressed to the French Ambassador in

Washington. Before Babe could snatch it, the doctor had the telltale letter and was already tearing the envelope.

"I could get ten years for this," he remarked grimly to Sheila. "You are my witness against these two," he added, indicating the sobbing Babe and the dishevelled Jap.

The letter told him everything. Knowing Barton, he instantly deduced that he did not intend to be alive when the letter was delivered.

"Barton has committed suicide," he announced calmly when he had finished reading it. "Babe, you are a widow. Where did he go?"

She stared at him, round-eyed.

"Is he dead?" she stammered.

"Yes. Poor girl, you are better off. Where did he do it?"

She broke down. With a wail like that of a lost soul she fell across the table from which she and the man she loved had taken their last meal together. Beating her head with her fists she abandoned herself to an ecstasy of grief. It was all clear to her now. Her lover had meant to die, and she, poor stupid girl that she was, had been too "dumb" to foresee his intention and persuade him to live and love.

"I know what you suffer," Sheila comforted, taking the girl in her arms. "I have been through it. You wouldn't want me to go through it again? Tell us where your man went. Please, if you are human!"

"Tell them," the distracted girl cried, wrenching herself free from Sheila.

"Is he dead?" the Jap asked before complying.

"Yes," Burdette assured him. "He has been dead for hours. Where did he take the man who came over to see him this morning?"

"The aquarium."

"Take us there, and you will never have to work again."

Before following the boy to Barton's "office," Burdette struck a match and burned the chemist's letter to the French Ambassador to ashes.

"If David is alive," he said to Sheila, "you and he can live in peace. This letter would have started it all over again—worse than Samoa."

The dolphin lock on Barton's office invited their attention. Half a minute's futile tinkering convinced them that entry was impossible.

"Shall we let him know we are here?" Sheila asked.

"Better not," Burdette advised, remembering the story of Quayle's life in Sydney harbor. "Barton has probably told him this whole infernal place is mined and timed to explode before help can arrive."

"What shall we do?" she whispered.

"Telephone to the Tombs for a safe-cracker. This is a bank vault door."

"Is there time?"

"I hope so," he muttered. "Better come with me."

"I shall wait here," she said calmly, white as a lily.

"But if——?"

"I shall wait."

Burdette ran from the place to fetch help. The Jap, sensing the imminent danger, followed. Sheila

was alone, numb and cold before the door which, in mercy to the man behind it, she dared not touch. The seconds lengthened into years, and she froze. Death in itself can be faced; the annihilation of one held dearer than life itself is beyond courage.

Suddenly, as if from the steel door before her, a voice seemed to speak. Forgotten impressions leapt into vivid life.

"A torch!" she cried, and ran from the aquarium.

By dint of patience, frenziedly calm, she succeeded at the house in reaching a garage by telephone.

"Have you an oxy-acetylene torch?" she inquired evenly, only half sure of what she wanted.

"A what, madam?"

"A flame to cut steel; you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes. You want a welder. No, we haven't an outfit."

"Where can I get one?"

"There ain't one in the village, so far as I know, unless the gas plant ——"

She cut him off and called up the gas works.

"Yes, we have one. What's the trouble?"

"Send it to the Cutts place at once. Ten thousand dollars if it gets here within ten minutes."

Deathly white she walked down to the gate to wait for the crew with the blowpipe. Four minutes before the men arrived Burdette whirled up in a car.

"The warden is sending his best," he panted. "Bear up."

"I am," she replied, biting her lips. "My men will be here first."

Eager to earn their promised reward from the "millionaire's dump," and more than a little skeptical that the agonized call for help was no more than an aftermath of a rich man's "party," four grimy mechanics tumbled from a clattering flivver almost at Sheila's feet.

"Have you brought your torch?" she demanded in a level voice.

They unshipped the blowpipe and four tanks of assorted gases.

"All set. Where's our ten thousand?"

"When you cut the door."

They followed her to the aquarium, and at a nod from her began their attack on the steel. The first hard impact of the hissing flame seared off the paint in a curling wisp of smoke, revealing the chilled steel of the door. Four minutes' expert prospecting with the flame revealed the location of the hinges. The men put on their goggles and settled down to a methodical, gruelling battle with the steel. The metal seemed to crispen as it passed from deep blue to cherry red, then to dazzling white.

Four hours passed in agonized silence. From time to time Burdette ran out to see whether his crew of "experts" had yet arrived, but Sheila never stirred from her station behind the crew with the blowpipe.

"It's no use, miss," the foreman said at last. "The flame don't bite. This ain't no common bank-steel."

Indeed it was not. Barton, expert chemist that he was, had put all of his knowledge of metals into the

construction of that door guarding the last line of his defenses.

"I guess it's soft," the foreman continued, "but it don't spark. We can't do a thing without explosives."

"Get explosives," she commanded as coolly as if she were ordering a dinner.

"I shall have to go clear back to the city."

"Then go."

"Very well, miss. Keep her white, boys, till I get back."

The man met Burdette at the gate of the estate.

"Where are you going?" the doctor demanded.

"For explosives."

Burdette glanced at his watch. From Barton's letter to the Ambassador, and the fact that it was to have been mailed at five minutes to six, he inferred that six o'clock was the "deadline" in the chemist's calculations.

"Better not try it," he said. "It is just five o'clock. My men should be here inside of fifteen minutes if they're coming. Can't you cut the steel at all?"

"No. It softens, but it won't flake. I guess it's a new kind."

"Probably. Here they are!"

A taxi shot round the turn in the road and pulled up with a screech of its brakes at the gate. Two uniformed guards leapt out, and beckoned to three professional looking gentlemen in civilian clothes to follow.

"What's the trouble?" one of the guards demanded. "Somebody locked himself in the family safe?"

"Just that," Burdette confirmed. "Hurry."

"All right, boys, bring your stuff."

The three professionals hurriedly collected their batteries, "sticks" of explosives, nitroglycerine caps and "smotherers." In four minutes the party, duly chaperoned by the two bluecoats, were busy about their preparations before the white-hot door. Under the critical eyes of their guards the three professionals worked with lightning speed.

"Ready?" the leader demanded.

Receiving a nod from his associates, he motioned to the bluecoats to clear the passage. Sheila and Burdette were rudely hustled from the building.

A muffled concussion announced the "shot."

"What do we get out of this?" the leader of the professionals demanded as he joined the party at the entrance with his companions.

"What do you want?" Burdette countered. Sheila was already half-way down the smoke-filled corridor to the shattered door.

"A farm in Montana," the man replied boldly.

"All right. What are you held for?"

"Burglary. A bank."

"We shall take care of you. If you must serve your time, you get the farm when you come out. It's a promise; good luck."

Quayle, running, met them half-way down the passage.

"Get out!" he shouted, thrusting Sheila ahead. "Run for your life!"

They reached the comparative safety of the garden in front of the house at about four minutes to six.

"How did you know?" Quayle asked the panting Sheila. His own face was like wax.

"A letter. Never mind now. Oh! ——"

Her exclamation was drowned in the deafening concussion that burst like a tornado on the calm evening air, shattering the quiet peace in an inferno of noise. The whole aquarium seemed to rise suddenly, then less rapidly, on the air, before it rushed earthward in a jumbled shower of rubble and dismantled battlements. Barton's last defense had fallen, and the revenge which should have been his had missed fire by a margin of minutes.

Of the stunned spectators watching the spectacular annihilation of the Cutts Memorial Aquarium, only Burdette completely kept his head. While the men from the gasworks and the guards from the Tombs, carefully shepherding their charges, gaped in pardonable astonishment at the shower of earth and concrete, the doctor grasped Quayle and Sheila each by an arm and hurried them round the house, out of sight, before even Babe could rush to the door to see what was happening.

"New York!" he cried, hurrying them to the lane behind the house. "Don't you see? You are dead. So is Barton. The French ——"

They ran from the alley and emerged on the highway just in time to hail a passing motorbus. In ten minutes they were aboard the New York ferry, two

of them officially dead and safe from persecution the rest of their lives.

"What's that?" Burdette demanded, pointing to a disordered mass of blue paper under Quayle's arm which till now he had not had time to notice.

"The blueprints and calculations of my invention. Barton 'returned' them to me with his compliments."

They were far forward on the upper deck, secure from the prying eyes of passengers. Sheila clung to her lover like a ghost in a dream, half doubting whether she had risen with him from the dead, or whether he and she were yet to take the last plunge together into the black waters of oblivion.

"What will you do with it?" she choked.

"This?" he countered, shaking the papers free.

"That! Your invention!"

"It is up to you."

"To me? Why?"

"Never mind. What shall I do with it?"

"David, I trust you."

"Yes; but how? Do you realize what you and I, officially 'dead' can do with this? In ten years or less you and I can rule the world. *Rule* it! Do you understand? Whatever you have ever wanted to do for the world or for yourself you can do! Nothing God ever made can stand up against this. Don't you see? You and I can make of the world what we will. You are intelligent; so am I. Why lie about it? Can't you and I together make a better job of humanity than all its Poyères have ever made? We can breed a new race; you and I can say who shall per-

petuate himself and who shall not. In thirty years we can transform the whole world. Society under our rule will be transformed in a generation. You and I alone cannot do it, but you and I have something no politician ever yet has had—the ability to hire better men than himself. Think what we can do! We can make science at last take the place of oratory. Once and for all we can pitch the politicians, bag and baggage, into the everlasting discard. Here is the means. I say, take it!"

She looked at him sadly, and Burdette suddenly found it interesting to inspect the engine room.

"If I thought you meant what you said," she whispered, "I should be sorry. But, David, you do not. You know as well as I do that the world cannot be remade by any one man. We must all work, or the work of one for another is nothing. My father——"

"Sheila!"

"Let me say it. He was insane. You are not. And I honestly believe that this terrible invention of yours was my father's ruin. You never knew him as I knew him when I was little. He was a good man, a kind man. Then, in the last few years of his life, he changed. Why? Because your invention showed him that he might be king of all the world. He was not selfish. Like you he believed that his own ideas were the best for other people. That, David, is the great illusion. Even if you are right, and even if you know that you are right, your own ideals of human happiness are not for the rest of us. We have a divine right to our follies and our mistakes. Who

are you to say that we shall be 'better,' as you think we should be? I like clean linen: my neighbor doesn't. Who am I to judge? Why should I say where she can find her happiness?

"No; your invention wrecked my father's character. And it ruined Barton. Your friend was not bad; he was merely vicious. Your invention destroyed him, body and soul.

"And look at yourself! Five years ago you would have laughed at anyone who should attempt to dictate to the world what it should eat and drink, think and wear, hate or worship. Now you talk of 'remaking' it all to satisfy yourself. Your invention has decayed your own character."

"Sure?" he asked quizzically.

"I am sure it has not. Why do you torment me?"

"Just to try out my acid test. If anyone tainted with the virus of civilization might be expected to covet the whole thing, surely it would be you. Now you scorn it. At last I have found one civilized human being worthy of sharing a drink—of water—with my friend Plato. After all, civilization is good, for it has bred you. Well, what shall I do with all this?"

He exhibited the blueprints and calculations which had caused her father's downfall.

"Destroy every trace. Never try to remember a single line of any of it."

"Very well. You are a girl after my own heart—at last. Burdette!"

The doctor, emerging from the engine room, hastened to rejoin his friends.

"Pitch this overboard, will you?" Quayle requested. "'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust'—and so on. What could be more appropriate than electro-colloids to the sea?" He proceeded to tear the fatal papers to shreds. "I found out how to extract the dissolved gold from sea-water on a paying, commercial basis—the thing they have tried to do for a hundred years. Now I pitch it all back into the sea, because I have found something rarer than gold—you, Sheila. Chuck it overboard, Doctor. We are officially dead; henceforth we live in peace. And we shall live, Sheila; I promise you that, if you come with me."

"I will come."

"To the ends of the earth?"

"Beyond."

"Tomorrow, then! We shall leave it all, for a spell at least, to fester behind us. I'm sick of it, and so are you. We shall go where the surf beats and where the clouds are white in the sky—when there are any clouds."

"Did you ever try to use your invention?" Burdette asked, rejoining them after having tossed overboard the shredded remains of Quayle's masterpiece.

"Yes, once only, and it got me into hot water. The second lot of gold I offered to Blaisdell's Bank in Sydney—the lot that caused my arrest—was manufactured aboard the hulk. I had my tanks working in fine order; it would only be a day or two until the gold began to accumulate at the rate of a hundred tons every twenty-four hours. The processes were cumulative, like compound interest. The longer it

worked the faster it turned out gold. Like a fool I wanted to see how good my gold was by offering some for sale. Well, I found out. Just as theory said it should be, that gold I precipitated from the colloids of the sea-water was the real thing, chemically pure."

"What would you have done," Sheila asked, "if you hadn't been forced to destroy your plant?"

"Well," he admitted with a laugh, "I feel an awful fool now in talking about it. But remember, I was still sore at the world. I hadn't got you, Sheila, though I knew deep down all the time that you were the one thing in life I wanted. But this is what I planned. As soon as my plant got to the point of being able to produce ten thousand tons of gold a day —that is about six and a half thousand million dollars worth every twenty-four hours—I was going to buy another ship to tow my outfit to New York harbor. Then I was going to install hoppers and a system of rapid unloading by means of lighters to dump the whole ten thousand tons daily, as fast as it was produced, onto the docks and let whoever wanted the stuff cart it away. By the end of a week my rate of production would have doubled. By the end of a month the world would have waked up to the fact that gold is as common as dirt when you know where to find it. By the end of three months government bonds would be worth less than the paper they're printed on. After that, with the gold standard abolished, it would only be a matter of a year or two until the lid blew off civilization, and it became a bad imitation of Russia."

"To think," she said bitterly, "that you must be hounded out of society because of a scientific discovery. For ages they have been hoping to get the dissolved gold out of sea-water. You, with your electro-chemistry and your colloids show how it can be done on a huge, practical scale. And they turn you out of the world, a beggar."

"Can you blame them? Gold in itself is not nearly so valuable a metal as iron, or even tungsten. Its value is fictitious, after you have used a little of it for a very few practical purposes, like filling teeth or making dishes that will resist some kinds of acids.

"What would the national debt of any country be worth tomorrow if I were to publish my invention today? Not five cents."

"I'm glad you have seen the light at last," Burdette remarked; "but I always knew you were not half so crazy as some of your pet theories indicated. It would be rather a dirty trick, wouldn't it, to destroy the value of the national debt over night? Think, for instance, of the millions of persons living on their incomes from government bonds. Most of these, in spite of what the wild-eyed socialists say about the 'unearned increment,' are not rich. For the most part they are old and half of them poor. Every last one of these poor wretches would be beggared. All national debts and millions of others, bonds of all sorts—the very lifeblood and nerve of modern industrialized and commercialized civilization—are to be paid in gold. Contracts and mortgages call for payment in gold or its equivalent, say treasury gold

certificates. Well, your invention makes gold as common as clay. The debts, and all the incomes and peaceful security of old age based upon them, would be worthless if your invention should ever become public. A debtor could pay off his mortgage with a few pounds of the worthless rubbish, as called for in the contract, and he would have the property to which he was not justly entitled, while the other man would have the useless yellow dirt. A fight would start. What happened in one case would happen in all. When you publish your invention all standards of value collapse. All over the world we should have anarchy or worse. The elaborate machinery of two thousand years is scrapped over night. Cutts was right, Quayle. Your invention, if given out suddenly, spells ruin to civilization."

"But it will never be given out," Sheila insisted gently.

"That is for you to guarantee," Burdette replied gravely. "You and David will be rich, as riches go in our society. I have already turned quite a slice of your securities into gold certificates. But suppose —just suppose—you have bad luck and lose all your money. What then?"

"We shall never try to reconstruct the invention," she replied firmly. "Take that as a promise."

"Even if you starve?" Burdette persisted.

"We shan't starve," Quayle retorted. "Remember, I have learned how to live. And Sheila, I guess, is as quick at new things as I am. To lose all our money might be the very best thing that could happen to

us—provided we got away first to one of the places where money isn't worth much."

"You fancy the simple life?" Burdette asked. "Don't deceive yourself, Quayle. You won't be happy without two tons of glass tubing and a carload of chemicals to mess about with."

"Don't I know it? To prevent possible accidents I'm going to lay in a stock while I still have the price."

"And what about your fine fury against civilization as such?" Burdette queried. "All evaporated?"

"If you like to put it so," Quayle replied with an ambiguous smile. "I'm not fool enough yet to think civilization is perfect. What of it? There may be some rotten spots in the world, but I'm used to it, and I know now I never could get used to any other kind of a world or to any other life other than that in which I have grown up. What is true of me is true for the other fellow—for the whole several millions of him. So why abolish it all? If I can't remake civilization in a mild way to suit myself by curing some of the sore spots, I won't destroy it and take away the happiness of some poor devil who thinks everything is fine and just as it should be. Who am I to say the other fellow shan't enjoy Limburger cheese because I prefer Gorgonzola?"

"Miss Cutts," Burdette laughed, "any time your future husband becomes unmanageable and gets sore at the universe in general, just agree with every silly thing he says. Then he will take the opposite side and argue himself back to sanity. I have tried it out

thoroughly the past three days, and it works every time. David can't resist an argument."

"I can!" he began, and broke off with a laugh, seeing himself about to prove the doctor's point.

"If the world is good enough for him," Sheila sighed, "it is Heaven for me."

"That isn't a bad attitude," the doctor agreed, "if you don't hold it to the exclusion of a little sound, critical common-sense. Where will you spend your honeymoon? I must keep in touch with you till we settle the money matters."

"It is for David to decide."

"I have been thinking," Quayle said slowly, "I would like to see some real surf again. There is a place on a beach I know of that I want to explore. Just to set my mind at rest I wish to find out whether there are marshes to the south. According to my notion there should be quite an expanse of stagnant water—hardly fit to drink—about fifty miles to the south of the beach I mean. And if my guess is right, a clean river should be flowing into the upper edge of the marsh."

"What an odd notion for a honeymoon," the doctor remarked.

"Oh, I don't know," Quayle objected. "A teasing theory like that gives you no peace till it is tested out once and for all. Sheila and I will do a little exploring. If there is nothing there we shall have had the fun of looking, anyway. And if the marshes of my theory really do exist, why then, I shall have verified Shakespeare's wild generalization that there are more things

in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy—or rather in mine, which happens to be science. Until you have looked out across that beach to the sea beyond you don't know what blue water is. And as for the sky—it is incredible."

" 'Whither thou goest, I will go,' " Sheila whispered, as they followed the doctor from the ferry.